

# LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1857.—VOL. LXXII.] (WITH CHRISTMAS NUMBER.) FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 3, 1893.

[PRICE TWO PENCE.]



EVE'S THOUGHTS ARE FAR AWAY WITH THE LOVER SHE HAS SENT FROM HER FOR EVER.

## BROWN AS A BERRY.

—301—

### CHAPTER I.

A SUMMER sun setting over a sober English landscape, and transforming for the moment its quiet beauty into absolute brilliancy as the sky flames up in all the glory of its seven pristine colours, and floods the earth in a sea of change-ful radiance.

A girl, sitting on a stile, in an ill-made cotton dress, too short to cover the pretty little feet swinging recklessly to and fro, and with a battered, broad flap-hat half hiding the sweet sunburnt face beneath it.

A man beside her, tall and stalwart, with laughing blue eyes, and hair that is neither chestnut nor brown, but a mixture of the two; the short, curled moustaches alone are decided in hue, and they are what is termed golden.

Just now the laughter is quenched in his

eyes, and a very serious expression has come in its stead.

"India is such a long way off!" he mutters, discontentedly.

"Yes, it is a long, long way!" she assents, but in a very different tone. Her lips are smiling, and into her face has come a dreamy, far-away look as though she would pierce the distance between, and see for herself what manner of land it is. She is very young—little more than a child—and to her India is still the gorgeous East in verity—a place to be desired, not dreaded as it is by him. "Oh! I wish—I wish we were going too!"

"Berry, what is it makes you so anxious to come?"

She brushes the flowers that are lying in her lap to the ground with an impatient gesture.

"Can't you guess? Can't you see what a miserable thing it is to be poor in England? Bare domestic economy without even a rag of illusion to cover it! I don't care for myself much, but Eve—"

"But Eve?" he repeats, curiously, as she hesitates.

"Eve is too beautiful to be troubled with the troubles of pounds, shillings, and pence. It is degrading for a woman who looks and moves like a goddess to have to wash her ribbons and turn her cuffs. Fancy Venus exchanging her divine draperies for a dyed silk!"

"You queer, precocious child, who taught you so much wisdom!" he asks, half-laughing, yet half-frowning at the incautious revelations.

"Experience!" she answers, shortly.

"The experience of sixteen summers—truly a terrible thing!"

But she does not audibly resent the sarcasm, only signifying her displeasure at it by half turning away her head.

Such a small, well-shaped head, the round white throat set firmly on the rather square shoulders; and if the face itself is brown and freckled here and there, where the sun has too warmly caressed it, the soft, sleepy eyes, with their occasional droll twinkle, and the full red

lips are ample apology for that, and form a very bewitching picture framed in a mass of curling tangled hair. She herself is utterly unaware of the attractions she possesses, and her companion is no less ignorant.

To both alike there is only one type of beauty in the world, and anything that differs from it must necessarily be at fault. It is no uncommon thing for a violet to grow in the shadow of a rose and be overlooked!

"We shall miss you very much," she says presently.

"We!" with a meaning emphasis on the word.

"Eve and I. You surely didn't think that papa would fret after you, and pine for your society?"

"And you think Eve will care!" he asks, anxiously, too eager for the reply to join in her merry, ringing laugh.

"Of course we shall care! We shall miss you all so much, and the depôt will be so dull."

Even now, in spite of the experience she had boasted, she does not see that it is Eve alone whose sorrow can comfort him and send him away almost content to wait patiently through the time that must elapse before they meet again.

"Yes, you will feel lonely without the regiment," he replies, absently. "There is scarcely a woman or child in it who does not know, love, and impose upon you."

She smiles a little consciously, and jumps from her seat.

"After all, the imposition can be no great matter if it is judged by the amount extorted! The women have a hard enough time of it, poor things. I wish I had the wherewithal to help them!"

"You do help them, more than you know, perhaps. Only yesterday I passed Sergeant Anderson's quarters, and, to my surprise, the doors were wide open and his wife was scrubbing the floor. 'Miss Berry was coming,' she said, as though an apology were needed for such unwonted cleanliness; and, indeed, the place was a disgrace to barracks before."

Berry blushes prettily.

"Poor woman! She is so grateful, because once, when her husband was in trouble, I begged him off. The colonel dismissed him with a reprimand only!" she explains.

"Ah! that was in the old days. Our present chief is not likely to ever err on the side of mercy!"

They are walking now over the fields towards the town, and Berry looks round her, cautiously, before she speaks again.

"Ronald! what is there about that man that should make me dread him so!" she asks, in a scared whisper, laying her little fingers appealingly on his arm. "Do you know I shiver when he comes near me; and I would rather look at the ground all day than meet his glittering eyes! They seem to read your every thought, and despise you so for what they see! He makes one feel so weak—so puny—"

"Why, child, one would think you were describing a modern Mephistopheles instead of a respectable middle-aged colonel of infantry!" breaks in Mr. May, laughing.

"How can you tell he is middle-aged! His face would never betray him. He might be the Wandering Jew for all we know!"

"The Wandering Jew in disguise then, with steely blue eyes, and an eminently un-Eastern nose, employing the best of London tailors," he answers, banteringly.

"Then, it is only my fancy that pictures him as being 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know!'"

"I think he is only stern and unhappy; and yet—thoughtfully—the men seem afraid of him, too, and there is always a sigh of relief gone round when he leaves the mess-table!"

"Then, depend upon it, he is a wretch!" declares Berry, dismissing him, summarily, with shortest shrift.

They are in front of a small semi-detached villa now, with a gate and narrow pathway leading to it, and she puts out her hand to say farewell.

"You won't come in, I suppose!"

"No, thank you!"

Somehow it is an understood thing that without an express invitation it is as well not to enter the tiny, furnished house, which has been rented by Captain Cardell.

Not only is he known to be in bad circumstances—a sufficient reason of itself—but he is also unpopular in his regiment, and apt to resent an inopportune intrusion as a premeditated insult.

"Then good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

But before she is half-way up the path he calls her back.

"Shall you be at the band to-night?" he asks, when she is once more beside him.

"Perhaps, if papa is not too tired. Is that all you wanted to say?"

"Yes—no—that is, Berry, will you do me a favour?"

"That depends on what it is."

"Tell Eve I want to speak to her alone to-night!"

Two bewildered eyes met his; then the pretty, piquant face breaks into a succession of dimpling smiles as the truth occurs to her.

"Oh! is that it?"

"Yes, that is it! Berry, do you think I have any chance?"

"Can't say, I am sure; women are so uncertain!" she answers, dispassionately; "and there is papa!"

His face falls.

"Yes, there is Captain Cardell. But, Berry, if she cared for me I would risk everything to win her. I love her so truly, so tenderly—but all this I ought to say to herself, and not bore you with it!" he breaks off, awkwardly, like a true Englishman dreading even a suspicion of sentiment.

"Never mind me, Ronald, I am so accustomed to listen to rhapsodies about Eve. Yes, I will deliver your message, and I think I can promise that we shall be at the band to-night. At least, I will try my best to manage it!" and then, with a bright, encouraging smile and nod, she runs away into the house.

The smile dies away as she gets into the narrow hall, with its one rickety chair and apology for a hatstand. Out-of-doors, beneath the wide, blue sky, which is free to all alike, the sweet, keen sea air blowing past, and the green grass under her feet, she can forget the poverty which has so cramped and spoiled her girlhood, taking from it all its gay, unthought and happy carelessness; but now it all comes home to her afresh.

"How hopeless it is, poor Ronald!" she mutters, impatiently.

"Berry, is that you?" calls out a thin, querulous voice from the nearest room, and the smile on the girl's face is faded altogether now, and replaced by a decided frown.

"Do you want me, papa?"

She stands just inside the door, keeping the handle in her hand, ready to escape as soon as possible, and rubbing one small foot against the other, restlessly.

"Don't fidget, child. Whom were you talking to out there?"

"It was only Ronald. I met him out on the heath, and he came back with me."

"I wonder how it is, Berry, that you never seem to have naturally the instincts of a lady!" remarks her father, fretfully. "I can allow much for your defective education, but not for everything. To me it is positively repulsive that one of my daughters should be running wild about the country, or promiscuously the town with any idle young fool who has nothing better to do!"

"Papa, how can you say such things! Ronald is not an idle young—" begins Berry, indignantly.

But her father raises his hand in deprecation. "Words that a man may use with impunity are not always fitted for a lady's mouth, and since when have you called Mr. May—Ronald?"

"Since he joined us five years ago. We have always been friends. Papa, what have I said wrong now?"

Captain Cardell shudders, and it is pitiful to see how the young face hardens under the glance

of disfavour which he throws upon her—to do him justice, almost unconsciously.

"Nothing; you cannot help it. It is the fault of my wretched luck, and of our poverty, I suppose, that you have caught the flavour of the barrack-room, and are more like a young subaltern than the daughter of a gentleman!"

Berry's cheeks grow crimson, and her eyes fill with passionate tears, but she answers no word, nor attempts to defend herself again.

"If you were only more like Eve!" he goes on, regretfully.

And his younger daughter fervently echoes the prayer. Although utterly devoid of jealousy, it is impossible she should not sometimes envy her more beautiful sister, who seems to please without an effort, and who, with her pretty, graceful ways, and shy dignity wins for her father a tolerance and respect his surliness would otherwise have lost him.

If Captain Cardell has a soft place in his heart, and it might almost be doubted now, it is for the daughter who resembles his young girl-wife, who died when Berry, her third child, was born. His whole existence has been a long disappointment. Every good has seemed to vanish at his near approach.

Expectations have been unrealised, hopes unfounded; and, after spending the best years of his life in the service, he is now only second in the list of captains, whilst, added to this, the regiment is going out to India, that El Dorado of impecunious military men, and his name is next on the roster for the depôt.

His home experiences, too, have not been happy ones. Unfitted for domestic life, even when his wife was with him; after her death he sank back into that selfishness and apathy from which she had only rescued him for a time, and on his three daughters fell the burden of striving to make their slender means stretch to the utmost, and the pitiful struggles to keep up appearances, with which, perhaps, no other class of society is so familiar.

His eldest daughter had died a year ago, and now only two are left—one just eighteen, and the other, poor Berry, with her quick intelligence and impressionable mind, who has only had such teaching as a cheap boarding-school could give, or her sisters have had leisure to impart, and who has now come under her father's expressed displeasure for her non-knowledge of what is right and what wrong.

Something of this is passing through Captain Cardell's mind; and, remembering the advantages she has lacked, he feels a little compunction at his more than needful severity.

"Come, run away, child!" he says, not unkindly; "and do not be so thoughtless again, that is all."

And, waiting no second bidding, Berry goes, ignorant alike of the cause of offence and of the reason why she has been so suddenly forgiven.

## CHAPTER II.

A BEAUTIFUL face pressed to the window-pane, and wistful eyes gazing out into the street, a tall, slight figure, and a waist so small that Berry spans it with her hands as she comes stealing up behind her.

"Eve, who are you looking for?"

"Berry, where have you been?"

The counter-question comes with unnecessary volubility, as though to hide confusion at being caught, and Eve Cardell comes quickly away from the window, and throws herself on to a low cane couch in the centre of the room.

Such a bare, ill-furnished room, in spite of all that has been striven to make it look pretty and fresh. Two small iron bedsteads ranged side by side, two or three chairs, mostly damaged, and a worn crimson drugget. With these drawbacks to overcome it is difficult to imagine that the place could be anything but comfortless, and the few pretty things here and there are too incongruous to be adornments. There is a dainty gipsy-table which was won in a raffia by Eve, and the two print patchwork counterpanes she herself has worked—a bunch of wild flowers





that Berry has gathered and placed in a broken-mouthed jug, and some unframed sketches she has made hanging on the walls. The window curtains are remnants of an old muslin dress, tied back with strips of coloured calico, and on the plain deal dressing table, with its cracked toilet glass, are lying glove-boxes, handkerchief cases, and other costly knick-knacks which might fitly be placed among richer, brighter surroundings.

The girl, too, who was watching at the window, is a strange contrast in herself. It is like the picture of Marie Antoinette in her dungeon. In spite of the damp, grey walls, the prison garb and fare, the woman is still every inch a queen. Eve Cardell, in her plain black gown, without cuffs, and a wisp of black lace round her white throat, has the same inherent grace which gives to its possessor the right of doing, being, and wearing what she pleases.

Her hands are clasped behind her head, and it is with her eyes that she signs Berry to come and sit beside her.

"Tell me where you have been!"

"If I told you where I had been you would not be much interested—if I told you what I had heard—"

She stops, tantalisingly, and busies herself in propping up a stool to stand straight and tolerably firm.

"Well!"

"I think it is quite safe now. I shall try it, at any rate," says Berry, coolly, suiting the action to the word.

"I don't mean the chair. What did you hear, Berry?"

"What will you give me to tell you?"

"Don't tease me, child. Why can't you be sensible?"

"Because I am a child, I suppose, and because, after all, it was nothing much. Only I met Ronald May. He is going on leave in a few days to say good-bye to his people. The regiment goes the end of next month. He will miss us so much, he says."

"I daresay!" with a slightly heightened colour.

"Eve, do you like Ronald?"

"Yes—"

"That is not very warmly said."

"Did you expect me to go into raptures?"

Berry looks up sharply into her sister's face, and something she sees there tells her that it is only her words that are indifferent. Her eyes are soft and humid, and, in spite of an evident effort for self control, her lip quivers a little when she speaks.

"He is very fond of you."

"I know."

A quick gleam flashes into her eyes, and for a moment makes them bright; then she turns away her head with a little moan.

Berry looks bewildered. If this be true love why should not its course run smooth? The poverty which had always been their portion seems too familiar an experience to be dignified into an objection, and she can think of no other.

"Shall you marry him?"

"Never!"

The puzzled expression is gone, and Berry's face is full of indignant scorn—even contempt—which after her impulsive wont quickly finds an utterance.

"Eve, you ought to be ashamed! How could you encourage him knowing there was no hope? How can you bear to see him suffer when you have caused his pain? I did not think you were so unwomanly, so false!"

Eve pales and bows her head, culprit-like, before her accuser.

"I know I was wrong," she assents, humbly. "But do you not think I have suffered too? I am not at all to blame."

"I do not understand."

"How should you, dear; you are so young! You were a child when Margaret died."

"Margaret! What had she to do with all this—with Ronald and with you?"

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you. I don't know whether it would be well to let you share the bitterness of the knowledge I have gained."

"Yes, tell me. It is better that I should know the truth than think you mean and mercenary as I do now," answers Berry, defiantly, staunch to her friendship with Ronald.

Eve lifts her face—pale still, but proud and unrelenting.

"I will tell you, and you shall judge for yourself if I am not right. Do you know what killed our sister?"

"She died of consumption," corrects Berry.

"No; her heart was broken. They called it consumption, and I suppose it came to be that at last; but if ever anyone was murdered by man's faithlessness, it was she. Do you care to hear more?"

The little awe-stricken face that meets her own is answer sufficient; and Eve, raising herself, and leaning on her elbow, goes on gravely—

"You were at school at the time, and I was less than your age now; but, because we had no mother, for want of a better confidante, Margaret used to tell me all. She had two lovers, and after the manner of romances one was rich, and one poor—one young, and one older. I said two lovers, but for a long time it seemed as if she had only one, for John Carew never said one word that could be construed into love-making for a long, long time, and she thought he did not care. Her other admirer, not discouraged by her first refusal, had asked her hand again, and papa and I both wondered why she would not say 'yes'! Papa was cross, too, indeed, angrier than I had ever seen him, for Sir Seymour Lumley had his title and great wealth to recommend him, besides being so really nice, so good and true as we proved him afterwards."

"And Margaret loved the other?"

"Yes, I wonder why it is that poverty is so attractive!"

"Women are naturally contrary, I suppose," says Berry, wisely.

"Perhaps so. That very afternoon in the garden she told me how it was with her. How she could never marry Sir Seymour, because she loved John Carew, and, strangely enough, the very next day without a previous sign or symptom of love, he (John Carew) asked her to be his wife."

"He may have thought she did not care for him. There is such a thing as a game at cross-purposes."

"Poor little Margaret. There was no mistaking her feelings, although his might have been easily misunderstood. Even after their engagement he was so collected and cool, no one would have dreamed that he loved her. Then his regiment, the—th Lancers, went to India, and they were to wait until he got his promotion before they married; so he came to say good-bye. I thought then his kisses were more like a brother's than a lover's, but—"

"Eve, how did you know?" breaks in Berry, suddenly, and Eve is obliged to laugh and blush.

"Nonsense, child! anyone could see the difference!" she answers softly, recovering from the attack.

"I daresay. I know nothing at all about it. Go on with your story, Eve."

"Well, he went, and from that time until now we have never heard a single word. He got his troop just before Margaret died, sooner than he had expected, but he never wrote—not even when he must have seen her death in the papers. Perhaps he thought a love-match unwise where both were so poor, or perhaps some other face had caught his fickle fancy. I can believe anything bad of him now!"

"And Margaret?" asks the younger sister, softly.

"She thought him true always. She said one day the mystery would be explained, and we should know he was right. She never murmured; she was content to die for him, she said, rather than live for any other."

"Eve, that was true love!" whispers Berry, visibly impressed, and leaning on the sofa's edge looks straight into Eve's clear eyes. "Dear, why cannot you love Ronald like that?"

"Because I have no wish to set the rôle of love-lorn maiden! I could not bear desertion so tamely as Margaret did!"

"Why need you take it for granted that it

would be so with him and you? You are too beautiful to be forgotten, and Ronald is so good."

"Ronald is a man, and very weak. I say it who love him, and surely you must have seen it too! I have no ambition to join the wretched army of girls who are engaged to (often mythical) men in India! India is a long way off—"

Berry looks serious. This is the third time to-day that its distance has been admitted—once by herself—and she cannot deny it now. Still it is unnatural that her sister should be so hard and unbelieving in the faith—the honour of men.

"But Ronald—" she protests, obstinately.

"I tell you John Carew was to all appearance as true as steel, a veritable preux-chevalier, and yet he failed our sister. A few days before they left I heard Margaret speak doubtfully of his love, and I heard him answer so earnestly that I never forgot the words or the tone in which they were said: 'Be content, dear! no other woman shall ever take your place. I will come to you when I can, I swear it!'"

"And after that he could prove false?" asks the other, with clenched teeth.

Eve bows her head sadly enough.

"Then you are right never to trust a man again!" declares Berry, decidedly; and from that moment says no more to further Ronald's suit.

There is silence for some minutes. Eve leans back on the couch and closes her eyes half wearily, thinking that now Berry's curioity is satisfied, she will ask no more questions; but she is mistaken.

The love-story she has heard—the first real one that has come into her life—is too new a thing to be lightly dismissed.

Presently she observes—

"And Sir Seymour Lumley—where is he now?"

"He is dead!"

"Oh! Eve; for Margaret's sake!"

"I don't know; it is difficult to say. I think he was very reckless of his life. While he lived he was so good to us always. I know that he paid for Margaret's tour abroad—a tour to Italy, in the hope that it might save her life; and afterwards for my going to a better school than where I then was. It was so delicately offered, too! Papa could not take offence. He said it had been his wish to give everything to Margaret that he had, and we must not grudge him the pleasure of doing the little good he could. I often think that if he had not died without a will it would have been better for us. We might have been independent now."

Another silence, longer than the last. Berry is utterly subdued. The romance she has believed in has been so ruthlessly upset—the old landmarks of rich and wicked, poor and noble, love in a cottage, and the misery of dining off a stalled ox—are all torn up by the roots, and for a while she does not know what to believe in next.

Then Eve speaks again. Eve, with her sweet voice and lovely face, in whom even unwomanliness can never be ungraceful, and mercenariness scarcely a crime.

"And so, and so," she murmurs sadly; "because she suffered so, and died of the pain, I decided long ago to err rather on the other side; to school my heart to forget, and, if repentance must be, to repent in a coach-and-four; in a word, to—marry for money."

"And I shall never marry at all!" declares Berry, promptly.

### CHAPTER III.

THE band is playing "Auld Lang Syne" when the Cardells come on to the ground that evening. Perhaps the bandmaster had thought it appropriate now the official notice for the move of the regiment has been received at last. However long hoped for, or however long dreaded, it must be a blow when the time of departure comes, and few are so destitute of friends as to regard it with equanimity.

But Captain Cardell, who, if he went, would take all he cared for with him, and who is so

anxious too to go, is only irritated, and expresses himself on the subject with some heat.

"Why not play the 'Dead March' at once," he asks satirically of one of the men as he passes. "The place looks funeral enough for anything!"

But the remark is drowned in the clash of trumpets and drums, and only results in a programme for the evening being handed to him.

"'Home Sweet Home,' 'the Blue Bells of Scotland,' 'Rule Britannia,' and 'God Save the Queen'—a lively selection I must say," he grows, crumpling it up and throwing it on the ground.

Truth to tell it is rather a dreary scene this evening. Half of the officers have already gone on leave, and the rest are looking unsettled and bored, as though longing to be off too. Only Ronald May comes forward with a radiant face which nothing could have made dourcast but Eve's absence. Young as he is and inexperienced with women, he possesses a man's instinctive vanity and self-esteem; he has not failed to discover that she loves him, and, somehow, since the conversation that afternoon his hopes have been very high. He carries her off now on some flimsy pretext, and Barry looks after them anxiously, hoping against hope, and yet scarcely knowing what it is she wishes. Eve's face is inscrutable; a shadowy smile hovers on her lips, but her eyes seem hard, almost cruel, when at times the white eyelids are raised, and through the long eyelashes you can see their gleam.

Her love for her dead sister has been, if possible, almost as passionate as that for her lover, and she feels a certain satisfaction in avenging the past, although in the present it inflicts as well such sharp pain on herself. Women are so incomprehensible in their loves and hates, it is not always possible to fathom their motives or account for them.

Barry, a favourite with all the young subalterns, and a privileged pet of the elder officers, is soon surrounded; and Captain Cardell, relieved for the time of his responsibilities, turns into the mess to read the papers.

It is the usual weekly gathering, the deadlively gaiety of a small garrison town, and each item that forms the whole is too well known to need description. Let the civilian guests or military outsiders be what they may, the hosts themselves are much the same in every case. Men and women of totally different tastes, and sometimes of widely different grades in society, meet here and seem to mingle. For the best part of their lives their interests run in the same groove, and their experiences are to a great extent alike; while, whatever their feelings, it must always be politic, at least, to pretend to assimilate.

H.M.'s—th, known generally as "The Pinks," from old traditions of their dandyism, is no exception in this respect; indeed, their regiment contains some very glaring contrasts.

There is Major Lennox, belonging to one of the oldest families in England, and his wife—Lady Blanche, the has been pretty daughter of an Irish peer, whose last guinea would be spent unhesitatingly in buying a new gown or in entertaining the veriest stranger that seemed to claim her hospitality.

With their large family of little children and the expensive, even extravagant habits of both, no wonder her small dowry was soon spent; and Major Lennox is obliged to remain in the service for the sake of the miserable pittance given, and the remote chance of gaining the command.

The junior major and his wife are cast in so different a mould to the former that it is difficult to imagine the two households could have anything in common. Nor indeed have they, with the exception of that inevitable interest which it is impossible not to take in those we meet at every turn.

A certain jealousy, too, exists on one side, at least; and though the husbands keep up a superficial friendship or rather acquaintance, the ladies cross each other's paths as little as practicable.

Major Payne might be taken any time for a prosperous north-country farmer; and as for

his wife, it has long been a matter of speculation among the elder officers, and a subject of bets among the younger ones, what possible country could have given her birth, and what she had been before she merged her identity in that of her husband.

If she is Scotch she must have come from some very remote islet, with an accent of its own; if Irish, "very bad Irish," as young Patrick Fitzgerald had emphatically declared when they chaffed him about his countrywoman. It had been current that she had earned a precarious livelihood on the stage; again, that she had been a schoolmistress, the daughter of a Methodist missionary; but nothing is verified, except that she wears the most wonderful costumes (wonderful in a sense that is not flattering to her taste), and the most juvenile hats and bonnets that the little town can produce.

Then, lower down in the list, for it is well-known that everything in the service (even the ladies!) goes by seniority, come Captain and Mrs. Haller—both much averse to the certain sort of publicity which the profession he has chosen of necessity entails. They would have been better content, had fate permitted them, to live for themselves alone.

The world forgetting,  
By the world forgot.

In striking contrast to these, again, is the adjutant and his wife, who have worked hard for the popularity they have doubtless gained in the regiment.

He is a long, lean, cadaverous-looking man of most melancholy mien; but his tastes are entirely at variance with his appearance, for never a gaiety comes off without his death's-head face being present—mounting guard behind the chair of the biggest personage in the room. His wife is more general in her attentions, her object being to please everyone, however humble; striving artificially after that inherent tact which Lady Blanche Lennox naturally possesses.

A tall, tolerably graceful figure—a plain face which helps her in her designs—for beauty is always more or less an offence to the womenfolk at least, and a mark for scandal in the other sex, while in the same degree ugliness is generally supposed to be a sign of virtue, and, like charity, sometimes covers a fair amount of vice. Rather a pleasant smile—a little false, perhaps—but the seeker of popularity cannot possibly always be true; a trained ringing laugh, and a voice that affects to be fresh and youthful, however jaded and old the speaker may feel. It is difficult to make a young wife out of an old bride, and Mrs. Lee-Brooke was thirty before she married! She has one child—a girl—nearly three years old—who is already learning to walk in her mother's mincing footsteps. There is an ensign married, too—a boy, just over his majority, and his wife an emancipated schoolgirl—consequently feeling herself of more importance than she had ever dreamt of being, and giving herself, as the other ladies indignantly observed, corresponding airs.

The doctor's wife, too—a vulgar, fussy, but good-natured little woman, whose husband ranks as lieutenant-colonel, and who, therefore, considers herself entitled to enter a room before Lady Blanche and sit above her at table.

Barry hates them all (all except Lady Blanche whom nobody could hate, however viciously disposed), and they look upon her with equal disfavour. A chit-of-a-girl who ought to be in the nursery, instead of being the centre of a group of officers as she is now. Her merry laugh is carried by the wind towards them—a laugh as unlike Mrs. Lee-Brooke's as sugar is unlike its many chalky imitations. In her old cotton-gown she is as happy and as unconcerned as the most gorgeously arrayed among them, and is more in danger of ridiculing their snery than envying it. As a rule, she is too good-natured to do either.

"Barry, tell me what Mrs. Payne is wearing. I was afraid to look," says Major Lennox, who is often found at her side, and has sometimes caught himself wishing that she could be added to his already sufficiently numerous progeny.

"What Mrs. Payne is not wearing would be an easier question to answer. I don't think there

is a colour missing; but I may be mistaken, for she is always bouncing about, and it is difficult to see; she is like a kaleidoscope on the turn."

"Too bad, Barry, too bad, on my honour," licks Mr. Le Sage; a conceited young ensign who has only joined two or three months.

The quick colour leaps into her face! "I am Miss Cardell—to you," she says, proudly.

"I beg your pardon—I heard them call you that, and—"

"We call her so with Miss Cardell's express permission," answers Major Lennox, stiffly.

"I beg your pardon," says young Le Sage again, feeling thoroughly extinguished. He looks about him for some encouragement, and finding none, after some few minutes' silence, walks away.

"Impertinent young scoundrel!" exclaims Major Lennox, when he is gone, but Barry interposes, blushing—

"Don't be so cross with him, Major. Perhaps he thought I was only a child."

"And what are you then?" quizzically.

"A woman."

"Heaven forbid!"

The exclaimer is Captain Burdett, a determined hater of the sex, and there is some laughter at his expense.

"The fact is," says the girl, with demure sauciness, "you only tolerate me for the time. You would never forgive me if I dared to don a long gown, and I shall forfeit your friendship for ever when I wear my first bonnet."

"Not so bad as that. But I shall give everyone to understand that I have known you in better days."

"When the evil of being a woman was not so thoroughly developed?" queries the Major in some amusement.

"Exactly."

"I wonder where the Colonel is!" someone says presently.

"And Eve!" says Barry, and then remembering, wishes she had not spoken.

"Perhaps they are together," suggests the Major.

And to Barry's surprise this conjecture proves a correct one, and they are seen coming across the lawn, side-by-side. Eve is smiling and looking pleased at her companion's attention, but he is as stern and impenetrable as ever, and it is impossible to tell from his countenance what he is feeling, or if he feels at all.

Colonel Chester is the sort of man whose age must be always a matter of guess-work, and the problem of whose character is seldom solved even by those onlookers who, it is proverbial, see most of the game. He had exchanged into the regiment as junior major two years ago, and soon after had gone to the depot, where he had remained with intervals of leave until he got the command, so that very little is really known of him, except what his appearance seems to indicate, and that is clearly in his favour. A tall, spare figure well knit together, hair that is dark and glossy save in front, where just over the temples it is turning grey. A straight, decided-looking nose, and eyes that are bright steel blue or grey, as the light catches them. His mouth you cannot see, either from accident or design; the heavy moustaches are allowed to fall over it and hide even the lower lip from view.

"Faith, they're a beautiful pair," declares Patrick Fitzgerald, the young Hilbernan, as he lounges up to Barry's side; but he is taken aback by the utter dismay pictured in her face.

"Oh! don't say that, don't even think it. It would be too horrible."

"Most women would think it an honour to be promoted to Mrs. C. O.," says Captain Burdett, quietly.

"No, no, not when it would entail marrying a man like that."

"One of the finest fellows in the service—to look at," says Major Lennox, not able to resist a sneer at their on-the-whole unpopular commanding officer, but at the same time throwing a warning glance at Barry. What she only suspects for the first time, he has long seen coming, and he does not wish her to say anything now that afterwards she might regret. But she either does not or will not understand.



"If Eve married him and I went to their house, I know I should avoid cupboards and never touch a key!" she says, pouting.

"Why!" asks the Major; but Mr. Fitzgerald, with his Irish love of fairy tales and folk-lore, understands at once.

"It is Blueboard ye mean," he asks, with a grin, and Berry nods.

"It is!" she answers gravely, mimicking his accent.

There is a general laugh, and under cover of it she runs to meet Eve and ranges herself by her side—a most determined chaperone. Not under her eyes, at any rate, shall this sacrifice be consummated; she will not help the courtship by either word or deed; she would rather, if possible, nip it now in the bud.

"Where is Ronald?" she begins, sternly.

"He left us half-an-hour ago."

"Where did he go?"

"My dear, how can I tell! He did not confide his intentions to me."

"That was strange, wasn't it?" says Berry, innocently.

And Eve, getting uncomfortably flushed and frightened at what she may say next, thinks it better to change the subject.

"Where is papa?" she counter-questions. "I am ready to go."

"If you really wish to leave I will find him for you," says Colonel Chester; and Berry, hating him even as she does, is obliged to admit that his tones are courteous—his manners that of a perfect gentleman.

"Thank you. I am tired, and it is getting late."

Awaiting no second bidding he goes, and the sisters are left alone.

"Eve, don't you think—"

"It's well to be off with the old love."

"Before you are on with the new?"

Eve does not reply, although Berry's remark is well calculated to awaken resentment. She has done as she resolved; but now the desolation that has fallen on her might be deemed sufficient atonement for the injury she has dealt. Ronald has gone, that is all she can realise now as she stands there—her soft, black marine gown falling about her, and a big, feathery hat covering all of the soft, bright hair except a wavy fringe in front. Her eyes, dewy as bright sea-water, and of the same deep hue, have followed Colonel Chester's retreating form almost unconsciously, but her thoughts are far away with the lover that she has sent from her for ever.

Berry gazes at her spellbound. She is out of her depth now; of lovers and love she has heard a little, but has not thought of anything like this—this passion that is disguised by sorrow into an agony fills her with awe, and it seems as if her sister were caught away from her up into a rarefied atmosphere where she cannot follow. She is ashamed of her puny efforts to make or mar a match. What is she—what does she know—that she should attempt to influence anyone's life for good or evil?

No, from henceforth and for ever she washes her hands of Eve's lovers.

Eve herself says nothing; only when Colonel Chester returns with Captain Cardell, she places her hand on her father's arm with a little shiver, and goes with only a murmured good-bye.

(To be continued.)

J. N. MASTERS, Ltd., Rye, Sussex, are again to the fore in offering exceptional value in jewellery and cutlery. Their Christmas parcel of cutlery containing fifty articles for 25s. is worthy of attention to those in want of serviceable and at the same time well made goods. It is really worth double the price asked. Our lady readers should make the acquaintance of this firm's jewellery catalogue as they cannot fail to find something to please.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Hoare, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

## GLOW OF THE YULE-TIDE MORN.

LIKE royal robes around the bier  
Of this the vanished year,  
Pile high the pyre with leaves that sleep  
In snow-drifts still and deep,  
And at still midnight wake the song  
Of all earth's songs most sweet,  
And gather with the humble kine  
Around the infant's feet.

In dreams we tread the westward way;  
O soul, look down the sunny slope  
For one far glimpse, one dying ray  
Of yonder land of hope;  
Be this thy weal all consecrate  
With memories fond—with dreams as  
bright;  
Go forth adown the sunset hill  
In evening's tranquil light;  
Go forth in hope and faith and prayer,  
Go forth serene, without a care,  
Into the final night.  
O'er each gray afternoon  
As if a life that sinks to calmest rest  
In the unshadowed west,  
Weave garlands of some happy, lingering  
thought;  
Thus haply is day's toil not all too dearly  
bought.

As from the westward brink  
Of yon broad hill where the departed sleep,  
I see, o'er snowy graves, some pilgrims  
weep,  
To me 'tis golden link  
That binds the quick and dead;  
Why weep, when just o'erhead  
The sun of resurrection floods with beam  
Even the fatal stream!

Wake in the joyous morn!  
Be there with trump and horn!  
Turn thy rapt gaze from the mystic west;  
In orient beams, o'er universe of snow,  
The midnight star fades an Yule's morning  
glow!

## THREE CHRISTMAS EVES.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

##### A SAD MEMORY.

BERRY! How cold it is! My hands are almost frozen, as I sit with my back to a huge fire in my comfortable study! It was just such a night as this when the great sorrow of my hitherto happy life came upon me; the snow-flakes falling fast and thick, burying beneath them my youth, covering me with premature old age when on the threshold of my manhood's existence.

Ten long years have fled since then, and now I am but twenty-nine, with streaks of silver in my black hair, and a careworn expression on my lined face.

Ten long years I have waited, waited in vain, and yet something whispers to me still to be patient—that my darling will return—until I feel as confident she will come back as that the bells will at twelve o'clock ring out the Christmas chimes; and yet those very bells each year mock me in my agony; bringing to my mind so vividly the night when she left me, without a word—we two who had been all in all to each other—and went out, I knew not whither, into the bitter night, the biting cold, with the old house-dog alone to lick her hand in silent pain as she passed him by.

Isen, beautiful Isen, but nineteen! I see her now as I saw her on that day, my sweet sister. Her face fair as a poet's dream, with eyes of cerulean blue, and hair like floss silk lying in golden rings on her white forehead. We two, the twin children of our parents, with none other to share their love!

My father, Sir Joshua Mandover, was chief magistrate of Ludham, the town in which we lived, our house being situated a quarter of an hour's walk from the same, with its pretty French windows, one each side of the entrance door, also of glass in unison with the former, opening on to a sloping lawn, whilst a flight of stone steps from the latter led to the carriage drive, over which the stately oak and beech interlaced their strong arms.

On the right was another room, looking on to a small pasture, from the conservatory leading to it, whilst a thick belt of wood and shrub divided us from the main road.

One or two summer-houses, like gothic cottages in miniature, were placed on the grounds, and rustic seats disposed invitingly beneath trees which in the hot season completely shaded one from the sun's rays.

Our mother was a fair, fragile creature, to whom we appeared to be the sole thought of her existence; and never shall I forget the night when Isen left us, and the paper placed in her hands, all blotted with tears as it was, telling her that she had left her home for ever.

She gave one look at the cruel snow, blown hither and thither by the more cruel wind, a speechless agony on her faultless features, and fell to the floor.

But the shock was too great for her delicate frame. From that moment she never spoke again, but gradually sank until the cup of our sorrow was filled to overflowing. She was dead.

And Isen—what of her? From that day not a sign, not a word, whilst the sympathy between us tells me she is not happy, and there is nothing left me but to wait, only in dreams being with her, as in those happy days when, beneath Heaven's canopy, we would sit together on the soft, warm grass, she gazing up at the fleecy clouds as they rolled into strange shapes, on their way across the firmament, and I weaving daisy chains or wreaths of summer roses to crown her golden hair.

And he, the serpent who crawled into our paradise, and culled the sweetest flower, I could even forgive him, could I think he cherished her as we had done.

From our cradle Isen and I had never been parted, she pursuing her studies under the tutelage of a lady resident in the house, and I having an experienced tutor to instruct me in the necessary Hebrew, Greek, Latin, etc., in addition to a sound English education; until my father rather startled me one morning by the information that he had made arrangements for me to enter one of the Universities, and not long after I found myself the recipient of those playful attentions usually bestowed on a freshman at Oxford or Cambridge.

The former was the one to which I was destined, and on the morning of my departure Isen hung round my neck with all the tenderness of her gentle nature, whilst the tears she could not restrain started to my own eyes, when straining her to my bosom for the last time, I bid her good-bye, with the promise that I would write at least once a week, trusting that she would also do the same.

I pass over the events of my college life, which was much as other young men's of my own age, though I take it to my credit, not so ricketty as some.

Amongst my companions was one Richard Ives, four or five years my senior in reality; but from the first taking me under his wing as though he was older by fifteen.

He was always ready to show me life, as he called it, and on every occasion acting the Mentor to my Telemachus. Other fellows frequently told me he was not to be trusted; but further than his repeatedly borrowing five-pound notes, the repayment of which entirely vanished from his memory, I saw no particular fault. He was ever anxious to do me any little service I might want, and, in fact, was most friendly.

"You must come down and see us, old fellow," he said, alluding to his home. "My mother and sister will be delighted."

Mrs. Ives, like her son, gave me a hearty welcome, when, after repeated invitations, I at last went, whilst the sister, a pretty, black-eyed

brunette, shyly held out to me the tiniest white hand in existence.

It was decidedly a jolly time that I spent at Hill House, the name given to Dick's home from the fact of its being built on a slope which led down to the river's side; and with Laura, pretty Laura, I was deeply in love before we had lived beneath the same roof a short fortnight, but then I was only eighteen, and maybe my susceptible heart would have warmed equally to any other pretty girl in whose society I spent so many happy hours.

Laura was two years younger than I, and we soon came to think more of each other than anyone else, speaking and looking as lovers should, interspersed with an occasional sigh.

But it soon ended more seriously. Their house not being far from Oxford, our meetings became frequent, until I found, boy as I was, myself deeply enamoured of my friend's sister, and thus matters stood when the vacation commenced.

It was Dick's last turn; he had passed his exam, and taken his degree, and I felt I could not do less, after the hospitality I had received from his widowed mother and sister, than give him an invitation to accompany me to my father's.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Claude," was his reply; so I wrote, telling Inez I was going to bring a college chum home with me.

Dick made himself so agreeable during his stay that he soon became an immense favourite with the sister, who declared him to be the most sensible young fellow he had ever met; and when I asked my sister's opinion with respect to my friend, the deep colour which mantled her fair cheek was sufficient answer.

The weeks that followed were very enjoyable, and when the time came that I should return to Oxford, I think Inez appeared equally grieved to part with Dick as myself, whilst my mother pressed him to join our party at Christmas, an invitation he eagerly accepted, returning with the holly and mistletoe to our happy home.

It was just such a night as this; the snow, which had been threatening for some time, coming down in tiny flakes, gradually growing larger and larger, until the hard ground was covered in virgin whiteness.

Dick had been with us now ten days, and it wanted but three to Christmas. When returning from a walk, in which I could not induce him to accompany me, I entered the drawing-room in the hope of seeing Inez, when all I thought it was deserted, and I was about to retire, my attention became suddenly arrested on seeing the letter and Dick in the conservatory adjoining.

He had just gathered a rose, which he was placing in the bosom of her evening dress, and so wrapped up were they in each other that they were unconscious of my presence.

"No, no, Dick," I heard Inez say. "I should never forgive myself did I accede to your wishes. It would break my mother's heart," and although her back was turned to me I could see her head droop, until taking his hand between her own she pressed kisses after kisses upon it.

"Then if you have so little faith, Inez," he replied, withdrawing his arm from her waist, "your love must be very small."

Her reply I was unable to hear, but as she turned I could see her lift her face to his with such lovelight in her beautiful eyes as no man could fail to understand, and I could almost hear her heart beat with tumultuous joy as he again encircled her in his arms.

To play the eavesdropper was most repugnant to my feelings, and so as not to let them suppose I had been an unconscious witness of the scene I purposely stumbled over a footstool to make them aware of my presence.

"You are soon back, old fellow!" said Dick, suddenly releasing my sister, and meeting me with the greatest nonchalance. "Miss Mandover and I were admiring the wintry landscape without."

"I see you were," I growled, when making

an excuse that it was time to dress for dinner I, after a few moments, again left them.

But Inez's words, "It will break my mother's heart," kept ringing in my ears, in conjunction with the warning I had received in the onset of our friendship that Dick was not to be trusted, and before descending to the drawing-room I had determined to question the former on the matter.

But the only reply I received was that I must have been dreaming, and for the first time in my life I felt that Inez was deceiving me.

Two days after she had left her home with Dick her companion, without one farewell kiss, not a word, not a sign, save the sobs which involuntarily burst forth as the night previous she threw her arms around my mother's neck, and the tear-stained letter which, later on, was placed in that mother's hands.

At first I seemed paralysed, but afterwards determined to call on Mrs. Inez. That lady received me most kindly, but Dick's conduct was as inexplicable to her and Laura as to ourselves, no objection on either side having been at all probable to have been made to his marriage with my sister; and notwithstanding my love for the former, I felt glad to leave the house, carrying with me alone his mother's assurance that she would communicate with me as soon as she knew the whereabouts of her son, and an inward thirst for revenge on him who had wrought us such misery.

I received but one letter from Hill House—it was from Laura. Dick, she said, had settled abroad, but nothing further as to what part of the globe he was favouring with his hateful presence, nor a word to comfort me with respect to my beloved Inez. I threw the letter from me not deigning even to answer it, and from that day I heard no more, whilst our lives drifted apart—pretty Laura's and mine—through his treachery.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RETURN.

How long I had thus allowed my mind to wander back to that time ten long years ago I knew not, until the sound of voices without recalled me to the present.

It was the waits, no amateurs either, but the clear, well-trained voices of our youthful choir, which blended in harmony as they sang in the cold frosty air.

This weather is enough to kill them, I thought, whilst listening to the bitter wind shrieking like a demon round the gable-end of our house, for a moment drowning the music of the children's singing, when a gentle knock came to my door, and the last note died away.

It was Johnson—our old butler—who had from long service become as much a portion of the house as the fixtures themselves.

"Do you know the time, sir?" he asked, casting a furtive glance at the little clock which ticked complacently on behind me, whilst he gave the glasses on the tray he carried, as I thought, an unnecessary jingle, to bring me to the recollection that it was Christmas-eve. "It's just on the stroke of twelve, and here's the fire nearly out," he continued, casting a reproachful glance in my direction.

"So it is, by Jove!" I answered, shivering, as I turned to witness the truth of his assertion, and bidding him replenish it without delay. "I must have been asleep," a fact which my fallen pen and benumbed fingers went far to verify.

"So I should think," was Johnson's retort, whilst with much blowing and puffing, he succeeded in reviving the flickering flame, when from the church clock resounded the first stroke of twelve.

"There she goes!" he said, alluding to the latter, and straightway rushed to the window to let in, as he said, Father Christmas, and I considered, anything but an agreeable draught.

"For Heaven's sake, shut the window, Johnson," I cried, which, after having given the old gentleman sufficient time to enter, with his attendant train of snow-flakes, the latter beginning quickly to cover the carpet, he did, drawing the curtains closely over it.

"Where is my father?" I asked, looking towards the punch-bowl, and the ingredients, which had been his habit to mix from the time I could remember.

"He's gone to bed, Mr. Claude," was Johnson's reply. "His rheumatism was so bad, poor old gentleman, that he said as how you would do the customaries, and send him up a glass."

By the customaries, Johnson meant brew the punch, of which the servants were invited to partake from the hand of the master of the house each Christmas-eve previous to retiring for the night.

Of course, I had nothing left me but to obey, the former the while instructing me as to the exact quantities required of each ingredient to make the whole perfect, and soon a steaming bowl of the desired compound was the result.

"That's the thing, sir!" said the presiding deity in the form of Johnson, whilst he quaffed a silver thimbleful evidently much to his satisfaction. "Shall I call them up?" and on my answering in the affirmative the entire establishment filed in, from the cook-house-keeper, a very majestic lady, who wished me a merry Christmas (although she knew well mine would be as dull as a Christmas could be), and many 'appy returns of the same, to the minutest specimen of boyhood in buttons, who smacked his lips after imbibing his share without expressing a single wish as to how I should spend the festive season, never opening his mouth except to drink until he joined in the good-nights repeated by all as they left the room, and I heard him inform the kitchenmaid it was "scrumptious."

As was his habit, Johnson, presuming on his length of service, stopped to have a word or two after the others had retired, which meant an extra glass with the young master.

"This is a Christmas, sir, this is," he said, stirring the fire which had now burnt into a cheerful blaze; "we hadn't had such a one this ten year, not since Mr. Claude—" and then he stopped.

"No, Johnson; you are right," I answered, knowing what he would fain have said, "not since Mr. Inez was here."

I could not bring myself to say her name, although it was of her we were both thinking.

"You'll excuse my asking you, sir," said Johnson, "but I suppose you have never heard what's become of our poor young lady?" and there was a wistful look in the old man's eyes, to learn some tidings of the girl he had nursed when an infant.

"Not a word, Johnson, not a sign has reached me to tell me whether she is dead or living, though I have an inward conviction that my poor Inez is in trouble."

"You have, sir!" said Johnson, not fully understanding what I meant, whilst seeing that the tears had started to my eyes he refrained from asking an explanation, and a few moments later, with a look of pity for me in my distress, he wished me good-night and retired.

How long I remained where he had left me staring into the burning coals I know not; a feeling of dreaminess came over me, and the sense of a kindred spirit hovering around me which I could not withstand filled me with a superstitious dread, bringing to my mind the story of the Corsican brothers, and I almost prayed that if it were only in spirit I might be permitted once more to behold my beloved sister.

At last with an effort I arose; the fire had again almost died out, and the stillness of death pervaded the household, and with a determination to retire also to rest, I advanced, intending previously to see if it were still snowing.

I drew aside the heavy curtains. It was coming down a thick cloud of feathery flakes, and I was about to reclose the former when the consciousness that I had seen a figure approach the window as I was about to carry out my intention withheld me.

For the moment I was startled; but a strange hope overcoming all fear which I might have felt I hastily opened the latter, when I perceived crouching close to the threshold the form of a woman, her black dress quickly becoming white



in the falling snow, whilst her heavy breathing was distinctly audible.

"Who are you?" I asked, stepping from the open window. "Come in. To be out in such weather as this will kill you," and assisting her to rise I led her within.

She had not spoken; but her form hung heavily on my arm as I bade her lean on me for support, whilst her laboured breathing was painful to hear, and not till I had made her sit by the fire, which I stirred to new life, did she uplift the heavy veil covering her features.

With a start I could not suppress I stepped aside; then recovering myself I was the next moment pressing the wasted form to mine, chafing her cold benumbed hands, whilst every term of endearment I knew I used to induce her to unloose those icy lips.

"Inez, my beloved, my darling, speak to me!" I cried, whilst I removed her hat, thus unloosening the wealth of her golden hair, the only charm left unchanged in my beautiful sister. "I am here, dearest—your brother Claude. Won't you speak to me?"

She raised her head from my shoulder, on which I had pillowed it, and her eyes looked into mine; but, oh! the tale of agony, sorrow and remorse which was concentrated in their blue light, whilst the pallor, almost of death, pervaded her features.

"I could not die till I had seen you, Claude," she said. "To know that you have forgiven me. Tell me you have, brother, and then I shall go away happy—yes, happy!"

"But you shall never go from me now, Inez, my darling," I cried. "You shall stay with me always, and the happy days will come back to both."

"Never, never, never!" she answered, wildly. "No, Claude, I must go even now. Kiss me, dearest. See, the snow has ceased. Let me out; I cannot, dare not stay. I only wanted to see you."

"But, Inez," I persisted, "I would not send a dog out such a night as this. Where are you going to, love, and I will come."

"No, no," she cried, as she readjusted her hat and veil. "I am going to him. See, I have covered him with my cloak, it is fur. I was so weak, Claude—so weak, or we should both have come to you, brother, he and I."

"My sweet sister," I said, endeavouring to detain her, "our house is yours. Stay now; my father—our father—would never forgive me for letting you go out in this weather."

"I could not stay," she answered, vehemently, "to let him know how low I have fallen. No, Claude, don't tell him that I have been here this night. Nurse Harvey will give me a shelter for a time, and it will be only a short time that I shall want one; but he—"

"Don't talk of him, Inez," I answered, impatiently; but seeing the pained look on her countenance I took her thin white hands in mine, cold and ringless both, and then I lifted my eyes from them to the pinched worn face drooping before me.

She seemed to read that questioning look, as quickly withdrawing them from my grasp she threw her arms around my neck whilst convulsive sobs shook her frame, when with one passionate kiss she tore herself from my embrace, and went out into the bitter cold, the stars alone looking down sadly on her in their brightness.

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE CHURCHYARD.

To follow Inez was my first impulse, and I had even moved from the window with the intention of getting my hat and coat, when, on second thoughts, I considered it would be wiser not.

Mrs. Harvey's cottage was but a short distance, and was it true that she returned to Dick? I felt I was not in the humour to meet him, so I went back to look out on the night. The snow had ceased, a soft white calm resting beneath the moonlight, even the wind apparently hushed to sudden stillness.

I was thankful for Inez's sake, knowing that but a few moments would elapse before she would reach her destination, so once more reclosed the curtains, and the old church guarded the secret I knew not of.

Christmas-day had set in; the hands of my little ormolou clock pointed to 2 A.M., but all sleep had passed from my eyelids, after all, not feeling satisfied that I had not persisted in accompanying my poor sister, followed by a vague comprehension of her meaning when she told me she had covered him with her fur cloak. Surely, I considered, there must be some mistake! Had he might be, but he could never be such a brute as to shield himself from the winter cold, and let her go on half-clad as she was.

Yet another thought puzzled my brain—why was Inez so thin and wan? It was impossible that want could be the cause. Dick a rich man, and his own master! Then in imagination I once more caressed the white, transparent hands, the fingers bare even of the plain golden circlet, when a horrible suspicion entered my brain, and instinctively I fell on my knees and prayed Heaven it was not true.

After a time I became calmer, determining in the morning to seek Inez—not naming her mid-night visit to my father—and then ascended to my room, with a dull pain at my heart, to dream troubled dreams, in which my twin-sister was ever prominent.

"A merry Christmas to you, Claude!" said my father, on my putting in an appearance an hour after the usual time for breakfast, a greeting which I returned, thinking the while what an empty one it was, the more so that I felt not only depressed but thoroughly miserable, and for the first time in my life was glad when the old gentleman informed me of his intention to go to church.

The bells even seemed to mock me, jarring almost painfully on my senses as they burst out into a joyous peal, whilst a little robin redbreast hopped on the window-sill, giving in his way the compliments of the season, and begging a few crumbs for his Christmas dinner.

Having finished breakfast, or rather an apology for the same, I drew my chair to the blazing fire, when Johnson entered to clear the table.

The snow which ceased when Inez had gone forth the previous night had not fallen since, while a bright, welcome sun shone out on haw and berry, causing the frost to sparkle as diamonds beneath its rays.

"Did you go out last night, Mr. Claude, after I left you?" asked Johnson.

"Go out!" I said. "Why, what should make you think such a thing?"

"Because, sir," and he advanced to the window, "you see them footsteps leading right up here. It's someone who come after it left off snowing, and I'm thinking they couldn't be up to any good."

"Then, I suppose, you mean to infer I should have been up to no good if the footsteps had been mine, Johnson?" I said, with a forced smile.

"Now, Mr. Claude!" and the latter looked at me reproachfully, knowing, as I did, that he, at least, thought that I could do no wrong; then cleared the table silently, whilst I was supposed to be reading by the fire.

Shortly before one o'clock my father returned, looking very blue about the face and red about the nose. It was bitterly cold, he said, and there was but a very small congregation in Ludham Church.

Widow Thompson, he said, had stopped him to say that a child had been found sleeping on one of the graves in last night's snow.

"A child!" I exclaimed, a horrible thought flashing through my brain. "How did she know?"

"One of the bellringers, her son, on leaving the church after having rung the Christmas chimes, had his attention drawn to what appeared a heap of black on the white ground. His mates had gone on before, so he went to ascertain what it was, and was not a little surprised on stooping down to see the face of a little boy. He was sleeping as soundly as though he had been in his bed, and the snow flakes rapidly weaving his shroud around him."

"And have they found any clue as to how he came there?" I asked, anxiously.

"No; it seems a mystery. However, Tom lifted him gently from the cold earth, having first ascertained himself that he still breathed, and then carried him home as a Christmas gift to his mother."

"How old was he, father—did they say?"

"Between three and four years," was the reply. "And far from looking on him as a burden or property likely to be reclaimed, the old woman is in raptures, declaring he must have been sent her from Heaven."

"It seems strange!" I answered, determining after lunch to proceed to Nurse Harvey, and hear from her what had become of Inez without further delay.

My father had invited a few friends to join us later on, so that it was imperative I should return before dinner.

Notwithstanding that several times I had been on the point of telling the former of my sister's return on the previous evening, I refrained from doing so, in the hope of learning more of her sad history before recalling to his memory the sorrow of his life at a time when, at least, for a few hours, he might forget it. So, leaving him in his easy chair by the fire to enjoy his afternoon nap, I started in quest of Inez.

A strong, and by no means unpleasant, scent of roast goose and onions assailed my olfactory nerves on nearing Mrs. Harvey's cottage. When I entered there was a strange look of expectancy on the woman's face I could not understand.

"I am glad you are come, sir," she said, after wishing me the compliments of the season, "as altho' I feel sure she was all right, poor young lady, I should have felt somehow anxious like if you hadn't been to tell me."

"Tell you what, nurse?" I asked.

"Why, Miss Inez, Mr. Claude. She's with you, ain't she?"

"Miss Inez with me!" I exclaimed, a terrible dread throbbing at my heart. "Why, I came expecting to see her here!"

Mrs. Harvey dropped the spoon with which she had been basting the goose, and throwing her apron to her eyes.

"Oh! my poor young lady, my poor young lady!" she cried, "what can have become of her?"

And then between her sobs she told me how that Inez had left her house the previous evening, coming, as she said, to me.

"Was she alone?" I asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "She came all sudden like; but I knows her as soon as she opened her mouth to ask if Sir Joshua was still livin', and Mr. Claude; and when I called her by name she said she was come back to the old place to die, but must see you, sir; so with a kiss from her sweet lips, after having asked me to give her a night's lodgin', she was off again afore I could stop her," and Mrs. Harvey again sobbed, while I remained as one paralysed.

At last recovering myself I went out, telling Mrs. Harvey I should leave no stone unturned to find my darling. I had one faint hope left, a hope that the boy found sleeping among the dead might be the means of leading me to her, and, futile though it was, I at once repaired to Mrs. Thompson's, where, alas! my worst fears were realised.

In their true English home, by a blazing fire, which threw a warm glow over the room, gradually darkening in the wan light, sat the widow and her son, the latter in the full enjoyment of a clay pipe, whilst a golden-haired boy was watching from his mother's knee the blue smoke, as it curled and rose to vanish into space.

I did not deceive them in the belief they held that it was through curiosity on hearing from my father of the strange Christmas gift they had had that I had visited them.

The tears were yet wet on the long dark lashes shading the blue eyes of the child, who ever and anon, growing weary of watching Tom, would cry for his mamma, but further than that, he was too young to give any explanation respecting himself.

"It was a clear case o' child desertion, an' no mistake," was Tom's verdict, an' though his

mother didn't want him to, he thought it only right to give information to the "police," which he had done.

An argument between the two was the result of this speech, whilst I sat with my eyes fixed on the baby boy, until finding how late it was I went away, a heavy sorrow at my heart, and those baby eyes ever present with me; and Inez, my beautiful sister, where was she!

#### CHAPTER IV.

LAURA.

I WAS so distraught on my return that my father could not avoid noticing it, asking me once or twice if my wits had gone wool-gathering, and my friends conjectured that I must be in love, I having no other apology to offer for my absence of mind than that I was suffering from a severe headache.

"I think I will go away for a few days. I have not been feeling very well lately," I told my father, when later on we sat by the fire after our guests' departure.

"You cannot do better, Claude," he replied, "for you certainly do not seem yourself, and a change would probably do you good."

So the next day I started for London, and from thence to Oxford.

I did not stay in the collegiate town, being anxious at once to proceed to Hill House, hoping there to receive news of Dick's whereabouts.

Mrs. Ives and her daughter were both greatly surprised to see me, so many years having elapsed since we last met; but, notwithstanding, they gave me a most cordial reception, but I knew they fancied some other reason than the seeing them alone had caused my visit.

Laura was Laura Ives still. From the pretty girl whom I had loved when a boy she had grown to be a lovely woman, and I was vain enough to think, from the admiring glance she favoured me with, that she had formed no mean opinion of myself.

Mrs. Ives looked thinner and more worn, but was as cordial and hospitable as ever.

"You are so altered! At first I scarcely knew you," she said, warmly shaking my hand.

"Yes, Mrs. Ives," I replied. "Ten years is a long time!"

"You are right," she answered, with a smile. "Laura, you see, is quite a woman, whilst I am grown almost grey."

"I think you but little changed," I said, "whilst time with Miss Ives has acted like a magician's wand."

"And has taught you the lesson of flattery," she laughed. "But tell me," she continued, "have you any better engagement than to stay with us, and make this your home during the time you are in Oxford?" and on my answering in the negative, it was mutually agreed that I was to remain at Hill House.

I fancied a brighter colour suffused the cheek of Laura on hearing my assent to her mother's invitation, and I wondered if it could be true that the old love had not died in all those long years.

Her brother was never mentioned by either, and I felt I could not, until alone with the former, enter on the subject.

Mrs. Ives naturally, whatever his faults, would cling to her absent son; whilst with Laura one girl's sympathy for another might save her from being blind to his short-comings.

"Mamma always enjoys a dark hour, Mr. Mandover, so I know you will excuse the gas not being lighted just yet," she said, as after dinner we adjourned to the pretty, cosy drawing-room, with the fire alone to remove the darkness, while it threw a warm glow over the rosewood furniture, casting a soft, quiet charm over all, as a few moments later Mrs. Ives fell into a gentle slumber, and Laura filled the room with subdued music and softened song, until even that died away, and unconsciously each became wrapt in their own thoughts.

"You must think us awfully stupid!" she said, at last, rousing herself from her reverie. "Don't you think we have been quite long enough in darkness, Mr. Mandover!"

"Why don't you call me Claude, as in the old days?" I asked. "Or is the past so utterly erased from your memory that we are to be to each other as strangers?"

She did not attempt to withdraw the tiny hand I had imprisoned within my own, and even in the dim firelight I could see the colour mount to her temples.

"I have never forgotten," she said. "They were happy days—too happy to last, you see."

"And would you have them return, Laura?" I asked, drawing her nearer to me.

"Yes," she answered, "if the wrongs my brother did you, Claude, had never been."

"I should be unjust in the extreme to hold you responsible for your brother's faults. But tell me, Laura, dearest," I asked anxiously, "have you heard of Dick? Where is he now?"

"He is living with his wife on the Continent, I believe. But don't ask me about him," she said; "I cannot bear to speak about it," and, releasing herself impatiently from me, she moved towards Mrs. Ives.

I had no further opportunity that night of again speaking to Laura on the subject, though her strange words, "She could not bear to speak about it!" kept recurring to my mind, doubling in my thoughts the mystery surrounding Inez's return to Ludham.

What could it all mean? Was it possible that she had gone back to her husband, after all? But as the recollection returned to me of the sad, worn face which looked into mine on Christmas-eve, I could not bring myself to believe it was so.

I had been now a week at Hill House, and finding all my efforts to draw Laura out respecting her brother's affairs unavailing, I thought to return home, thinking it likely by so doing to hear tidings of my poor sister.

"So you are determined not to extend your visit?" Mrs. Ives asked, on my telling her of my intention to return home.

"Yes," I replied, "much as I regret doing so. I feel it necessary that I should not be away longer."

Then as the former left the room, turning to Laura—

"Will you miss me, dear?" I asked; "and may I take away with me the promise that you will be my darling wife?"

I had advanced to where she sat, her one hand nervously opening and shutting a book which lay on the table, whilst I clasped the other, waiting for the answer I longed to hear.

I had learnt during those days spent at Hill House that she was dear—very, very dear to me; and when she upraised her soft, dark eyes to mine I read her answer there, and then I pressed her to my heart—my own, my darling!

The book with which she had been toying fell to the floor with a bang, which startled us in our first love-dream, and on stooping to recover it a letter fell from between the leaves.

I was about to replace it in its former place when Laura, hastily seizing it, put it in her pocket, with the hope, I could not mistake, that I had not seen the handwriting, but was too late. It was Dick's.

I could not fail to recognise that illegible scrawl—one could call it nothing else; but why she should endeavour to conceal it was to me a puzzle, the more so that it was addressed to her mother.

I felt, in consequence, an uncontrollable desire to see the contents, and believed if the opportunity offered itself I should not hesitate to avail myself of it.

Mrs. Ives was much pleased on hearing of her daughter's engagement, and my time being short, she allowed us several opportunities of love-making by every now and then remembering that her presence was required elsewhere.

"I know mamma runs away because she thinks we don't want her company," Laura said the next morning, as the former had had an imaginary cause to leave the room. "Let us go for a walk, Claude; it is beautiful out;" and on my acquiescing, she left with the intention of dressing for the purpose.

She had taken her handkerchief from her pocket on opening the door, and as it closed

behind her my eyes became riveted on a small white thing lying on the carpet, and with a sudden impulse I seized Dick's letter.

My hand shook, and I felt like a guilty creature as, resuming my seat, I hastily opened it, fearing that I should be disturbed before having time to read its contents.

Laura must have noticed the change which had come over me on her return, for she had to remind me twice that she was ready before I realised the fact, when apologising, saying I must have fallen asleep, I staggered to my feet, going out into the cold, frosty air, with her hand resting on my arm, as in a dream, and that letter scorching into my heart.

#### CHAPTER V.

FOUND.

I FELT a relief, when once more I found myself in the train speeding homewards. To stay longer with Laura and not tell her of my discovery was impossible, and the fear that did she find out the surreptitious way in which I obtained my knowledge she might discard me for ever filled me with dread.

I felt so bowed down with my sorrow that had she shut her heart against me I should have succumbed to my unhappy fate. Even that bitter feeling of revenge I harboured against Dick softened as in imagination I could see her dark, velvety eyes fixed on mine in gentle pleading that I should withstay my purpose.

The new year, bright and smiling, appeared to give me a welcome home. The ground was still covered in white, and the hoar frost sparkled as brilliant in the sun.

"They have discovered the woman who deserted her child and left it to perish on Christmas-eve," my father said, when we sat together over our grog on the evening of my arrival.

"Yes," I answered, "have you seen her?"

"No," was the reply, "she is to be brought up to-morrow morning, when Thompson will appear against her."

"Where did they find her, and what kind of woman is she?" I asked, anxiously.

"There was a reward for her apprehension, and it appears some people who sheltered her on that night, hearing her rave in a fit of delirium (for it appears she was almost dead when they took her in) about her child, came to the conclusion she must be the woman wanted, so gave information to the police, with the result that she will be brought before me to-morrow morning."

"Poor thing!" I said, whilst a fearful dread of which I could scarcely realise the fact ran through my brain.

Ludham was a small town, on market days alone evincing much more life than the surrounding country. But it had its town hall, police-station and court house, all within a short distance of each other; it boasted but one principal street, with tiny lanes and alleys emerging from the same, and a large square, in which twice a week were ranged stalls for the sale mostly of farm produce from the neighbouring villages.

The latter of the public buildings, with the exception of holiday times, was little used, the inhabitants being mostly of a quiet, law-abiding class, though at times a black sheep would steal into the flock; but on this morning there was great excitement amongst the townfolks, and the space within allotted to the public was completely filled when Sir Joshua took his seat on the bench.

One moment I felt the hot blood rush through my veins with fevered madness, the next a cold chill caused me to shiver from head to foot, as I took my seat watching the proceedings.

Like one in a dream I heard the subdued voices of those assembled; I saw the mysterious going to and fro of policemen, the whispered confidences of the gentlemen seated at the table, the advent of my father's clerk, who took his place beneath the magistrate, and then I heard "Silence" uttered in a stentorian voice, and my father himself entered.



There was an unusual list of charges this morning, and when I saw a woman ushered into the dock I strained my neck to catch a view of her features, but soon saw that she was not the one for whom so many were anxiously waiting.

She was a middle-aged Irishwoman, against whom a gentle, fair-haired lady appeared for assault, it transpiring that not only did this daughter of Erin insist upon having the kitchen in her sole possession, but resorted to force of arms in ejecting her mistress to carry out that determination on the latter asserting her right to enter it.

"Och! an' she be no luddy at al', at al', yer honour," said the former, with a scouting look at her prosecutor, "for wam's it herself that dhrove me to it by tellin' me to lave afore I had been in the house a fortnight?"

"My only wonder is she kept you so long if you behaved there as you are behaving now," was my father's reply, with the addition of seven days, in which she could draw a comparison between the service she would be called upon to perform and that she had lately left, when raining anything but blessings on his head and that of the fair-haired lady she was removed to the gaoler's room.

One or two cases of people failing to distinguish between *meum* and *teum*, others who had imbibed rather more than was good for them at the expense of five shilling floor, and then there was a simultaneous stir in the little court as a young woman was placed in the dock, with audible remarks, which were speedily hushed, when "Silence" was again enforced by that voice which did not fail to command obedience.

I saw Mrs. Thompson with her son enter a few moments before, the latter carrying in his arms the boy he had rescued from the death awaiting him in his snowy bed. They sat on a form assigned them behind where the prisoner stood, awaiting the time they would have to give evidence.

I could feel my heart thump-thump within me, the sight of that trembling creature, whose features were completely hidden beneath a thick veil having fully aroused me to a sense of my situation; then as the charge was read Thompson's name was called, and he entered the witness-box.

He told plainly how he had with his mates left the church about half-past twelve on Christmas-eve when they had been ringing the bells, and how it was that his attention was attracted to where the child lay, his tiny head pillowed on a grave, and the snow-flakes rapidly covering him.

I never looked at Thompson, my eyes being irresistibly drawn to where the prisoner clutched at the rail of the dock for support. Through the veil which covered her features I fancied I could see the agony working over the same, as her bosom heaved perceptibly beneath her thick ulster; but as a child's cry was heard in the court she quickly turned to the spot from whence it proceeded, when upraising her veil "Mamma, mamma!" re-echoed through the building, and the boy, freeing himself from Mrs. Thompson's embrace, rushed to her arms.

In that moment all was forgotten by her save the recovery of her lost treasure, whilst all assembled appeared to reverence the mother's feelings, and acquit her of the crime with which she was charged.

To me those minutes seemed as hours until she should again turn, so that her face might become visible, and when she did—when those eyes which I longed though dreaded to behold fell on me with their mute appeal full of intense suffering—I felt an agonising pain shoot through my frame, and then the court, the prisoner, the assembled crowd swam before me. I heard a shuffling of feet, a piercing scream, a jumble of excited voices, and whilst as though paralysed, unable to move, I saw my father carried senseless from his seat.

He was taken to his private room, and a doctor quickly summoned, and when I had sufficiently recovered my scattered senses to follow I found him slightly better. It was only a fainting fit I was told, but when I stooped, so as to hear what

he appeared anxious to say to me, Inez was the name which fell on my ear.

It did not need this explanation to tell me the cause of my father's sudden indisposition. I knew too well that those beloved features could never be erased from his memory, and what I had dreaded had come to pass.

A quarter of an hour later he asserted to his attendants that he was able to resume his duty, and once again the prisoner, who meanwhile had been withdrawn, was placed in the dock.

The latter had schooled herself previously to be able to stand the trial, and this time her fair face was uncovered as she stood there with her baby-boy clinging to her slender form; and I, her twin-brother, with a kindred spirit, suffering in unison with hers, my arms the first to embrace her, when a few moments later she stepped forth acquitted—a free woman.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TELEGRAM.

It was but a nice day's wonder, that scene in the court-house, and then Ludham became restored to its original quiet.

Inez was again an inmate of our home, and though numerous conjectures were raised by the servants with reference to her sad history, they soon began to lose the curiosity they at first felt in the pleasure they experienced in having her once more amongst us, whilst my little namesake became the pet of the household.

Week past week, Dick's name never mentioned—all remembrance of him, as far as I was concerned, resting alone in the shattered frame and sad face of my once joyous sister. She had been very ill after that dread experience in a felon's dock; and much at times as I desired it, I did not deem it advisable to recur to the past, nor did I let her know that I was in possession of her secret until some time after.

I had paid another visit to Oxford, and was delighted in finding the Inez in total ignorance of what had transpired. Whether Laura thought I had taken the letter she dropped or no she never mentioned it. I told her of Inez's return in the hope that she would speak of Dick, but to no purpose, she being most reticent on anything connected with her brother; but on her accepting the invitation I gave in my father's name that she would come and stay with my sister for awhile, I determined before she arrived to speak of him to the latter.

The early spring had set in, budding trees as though by magic bursting into new life. Inez and I were seated by the open window through which little Claude could come and go at will.

"Why did you not name him after his father, Inez?" I asked. She looked up from the toy whip which she had been replying with those soft, sad eyes, in which the sorrow never died, whilst she quietly answered—

"Do you like it better than Claude?" and then resumed her occupation.

"Laura will be here next week," I continued. "You will be happier then, darling."

"Laura here!" she exclaimed, "his sister. Then I must go away."

"Go away!" I answered. "Why should you go away?"

"Oh, Claude, don't ask me. You don't know, dear, or even you, perhaps, would not have sheltered me. I know I was wrong to come here, but the temptation was too great, and I feel you will forgive me that; but to meet Laura, your future wife, she would never forgive the insult thus offered her. No, no, Claude! dearest brother, I have brought misery enough on you already. I will spare you that."

"And if she knew, and still longs to meet you as a sister, Inez?"

She lifted her face to mine—a smile of incredulity beaming over her features.

"He would never tell her," she said, "and would you love me less, Claude, did I tell you?"

"You have no need to tell me, Inez," I answered, pressing a kiss on her mouth before she could complete the sentence, and then I told

her how I had learnt the story of her misery and his villainy.

"Hush!" she said. "Remember he is my child's father." "And you still love this man, Inez?" I asked.

Her golden head drooped, drooped till it became buried in her hands; when sob after sob broke from her bosom, and I knew that my sister (as I felt a jealous pang at my heart) alone loved Dick, the man who had wrecked her life's happiness, the wretch who had robbed her of her youth and beauty, and then left her to perish.

Whether my thoughts were reflected on my countenance, as I threw a pitying look upon her, I know not, but she appeared to read them, when recovering from her sudden emotion.

"No, no, Claude," she said, "he was not the villain you deem him; it was not his doing that I had neither food nor shelter. He did not drive me from his home, but I fled, tearing myself from his embrace, which I had no right to receive, crushing the love he gave me beneath my feet because it was not mine; and taking with me my boy and my broken heart, but loving him still, thus making my misery the harder to bear."

"My poor darling?" I said, whilst drawing her closer to me. "To know that he was kind to you, Inez, I could almost forgive him the rest."

"And Laura?" she asked.

"Laura knows all, dear," I answered, "and is too good a girl to be uncharitable. She will love you, Inez, if you will let her, and will, if she can, make some reparation for a brother's fault."

A kiss was her only answer, and from that time we both looked forward eagerly to Laura's visit, Inez even seeming to regain a little of her former spirit, as she superintended preparations for her visit, whilst little Claude became the constant companion of his grandfather.

I had had several letters from my darling, and it was arranged that shortly after her stay with us our wedding was to take place, I feeling that now Inez had returned my father could better dispense with my society.

The day of Laura's expected advent at last arrived, when, as the hour drew near, I, with my sister, anxiously watched for her coming from the window which looked on to the drive.

"She must have taken a later train than she intended," I said at last, after having fruitlessly strained my eyes until they ached, and my ears with the same result, in the expectation of the first sound of carriage wheels and the first glance of my *fiancée* falling on my senses.

Thus hour past hour, and still no arrival on the part of Laura, till I became so restless and excited that I was confident an accident on the line must have happened, and forthwith despatched a servant to the station to ascertain the cause that the train was so late.

It was the last that would arrive at Ludham that day; therefore, on the return of my messenger with the intelligence that it had come in some time since, I knew it was useless to watch for her longer.

"What could it all mean?" I asked, expressing my fears to Inez that Laura must be ill, feeling sure that nothing else would make her disappoint us.

"I should telegraph if I were you, Claude," she answered, and I was about to carry her proposition into effect when a loud, double knock at the hall door attracted our attention, and a few minutes after a servant entered with the significant yellow message.

I hastily tore it open, whilst the latter stayed, awaiting the reply.

Yes; it was from Laura.

"Come quickly; bring Inez with you. Cause imperative. Return answer prepaid."

My sister was looking over my shoulder reading the message, and further than that I could feel her hand tremble as it rested on me. I did not stay to mark the effect of the message on her, when hastily filling in the reply I delivered it to the servant.

Then turning, I saw Inez from whose face every vestige of colour had fled, whilst her eyes

had become distended with the fear which had taken possession of her.

"You will go, dear?" I asked.

"Yes, yes!" she asked. "Oh! Claude, can it be that Dick is ill, perhaps dying?" and she burst into tears.

"I cannot say, my sweet sister," I replied, "but you must not meet sorrow half way, but be the brave little woman you always were, for my sake and for—his."

I could scarcely bring myself to utter the last word, but I knew, if such were the case, that any ill-feeling I might have harboured towards him must now give way; therefore, tenderly kissing her, I told her to prepare for the journey, whilst I went to advise my father of the reason of our hasty departure.

The latter was in his favourite room; it was already dark, and lighted but by the cheerful fire, whilst the old gentleman, with little Claude on his knee, was sitting near the same, making rabbits on the wall to the intense delight of his little grandson.

He was in the belief that Inez had left her husband due to the unkind treatment she received from him; but into minute details he never cared to inquire, hoping in his heart they would eventually be reconciled, whilst neither she nor I deemed it advisable to enlighten him on the subject; therefore he readily assented to our speedy journey, promising the while, when at the last Inez pressed the boy to her bosom, that he would take every care of him during her absence.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AT THE GATES OF DEATH.

WE had not a moment to spare to catch the last train for London, therefore without waiting to select more than was absolutely necessary, we were soon on our way, with a small portmanteau, which we easily placed beneath the seat of the first-class compartment we had entered.

We had but one fellow-traveller, an old gentleman, who immediately ensconced himself in a corner, putting his legs on the seat, and covering them with a large plaid, after which arrangement he composed himself to sleep, a state of unconsciousness evidently (from the snores proceeding from his side of the carriage) he had little trouble in attaining, whilst Inez and I remained both alert in our own thoughts.

There was no moon, and the intense darkness, relieved but by the faint light emanating from the lamp in our carriage, seemed weird and strange, as we rushed on to the snort of the engine, and the occasional shriek of the whistle, until numerous coloured lamps in the distance assured us we were not far from our journey's end, and with a start, as a man entered with a lantern to collect our tickets, our fellow-traveller awoke, under the impression that he had just fallen asleep.

It was imperative to remain in London that night, so after having assured ourselves as to the earliest hour we could proceed to Oxford the following morning, we adjourned to the nearest hotel.

It was with difficulty that I could prevail on Inez to partake of any refreshment previous to our retiring, but the assurance that she would require all her strength on the morrow appeared to influence her in inducing her to partake of what I had ordered.

Her room adjoined mine, and I could hear her all through the night restlessly pacing the same, with at short intervals an attempt to sleep, during which her sobs reached my ears.

There was a hushed stillness surrounding Hill House on our arrival, which appeared to confirm our worst fears, and as Laura threw herself into my arms I could see her pretty eyes were red with weeping; then, as she advanced to Inez, her own sorrow faded before the great grief portrayed in the countenance of the other.

There were no tears now in my sister's; the suffering she was enduring was too great for words, too intense to well forth, save by a burning look of agony, approaching almost the fire of madness as it became apparent in the dumbness of her despair.

"Won't you speak to me?" Laura asked, approaching to where she stood, and tenderly taking her hands within her own, which she allowed to remain within her clasp. "You know we are sisters, dear," she continued, "and I want you to love me for his sake, and he, Dick, wants us to love each other."

The sound of his name seemed to recall her to where she was.

"Dick," she asked. "Oh! tell me, is he here?"

"Yes, and wants you to go to him," was the reply.

Laura released her cold hands, so bitterly cold, and with her own unfastening her travelling wraps she led her from the room, her arm gently encircling her slender waist, as the eyes of Inez alone spoke of the gratitude she felt.

Mrs. Ives was seated by the fire of the room they entered, of which the blinds were lowered to exclude the light of the noonday sun, whilst on a bed shaded at the head by heavy blue curtains lay the form of Dick.

The former held up a warning finger that they should not disturb the invalid, who had just fallen into a gentle sleep, and on Laura silently bringing Inez forward, she clasped her affectionately in her arms, telling her to rest there until her son should awake.

Unrealistically she sat where they placed her, no sign, no movement, to speak of the terrible sorrow working within, the only sound in that still chamber the heavy breathing of the sufferer, as he would toss from side to side, and unconsciously mutter in his sleep.

The minutes seemed as hours, nothing to break the fearful quietude but the monotonous tick of the gilt timepiece marking those minutes as they passed, until becoming more restless Dick awoke.

"Mother," and as Mrs. Ives moved towards him she so placed the curtains that Inez's form was hidden from his gaze until she had in some measure prepared him for the meeting; whilst Inez herself, scarcely able to restrain her impatience, awaited with beating heart the time when she could press her warm lips to his.

"Is she come mother?" she heard him ask, and on Mrs. Ives answering in the affirmative, she could stay no longer, as with tremulous steps she approached to the bedside, and then she recoiled with fear at the sight which presented itself.

Could those sunken eyes, those drawn features, belong to her once handsome Dick? But as a feeble smile passed over them and a tender love-light beamed over that pallid countenance she fell on her knees beside him who was her world, her life, whilst she begged for forgiveness for having ever left him.

"There is nothing to forgive, pet," he said, as, extending one thin transparent hand, he rested it on her golden head. "What you did, love, you did from a pure and true motive, whilst I, sinner that I was, thought to deceive you; but my sin found me out, and I have, indeed, suffered for the wrong I contemplated. When you left me, Inez, my life became a blank. I could not rest; I dare not follow you to where I hoped you would go, for Claude, I knew, would never rest until he had revenged himself on his sister's betrayer."

"Hush, darling! You must not talk so much now. Wait until you are stronger, and then you can tell me all."

It was Inez who spoke, as she bent low over the sufferer's bed, allowing her fair face to rest against his hollow cheek, whilst her tears fell on his broad forehead.

"No, Inez," he continued. "I shall feel better when I have told you all. When you left, darling, I determined to pursue inquiries. So many years had passed since Helena and I had parted that a hope I dared not cherish—the straw to which I clung like a drowning man—gave me fresh vigour to continue my search, and five days after you left me, with only that short, cruel note to tell me we had parted for ever, I was again in England, having fully made up my mind that my heart should break before I would seek your presence until I could prove that hope fulfilled, or your love should induce you to drown

your scruples in that great love which you said you had for me."

"That could never be Dick, though the parting broke my heart."

"But, Inez, my beloved!" he added, drawing her face nearer to his own, "you are, you always were my—"

But the weakness against which he had struggled overcame him before he could complete the sentence.

Inez felt his cheek grow deadly cold against hers, whilst the hand she held felt lifeless by his side, his breathing so faint as to be scarcely perceptible.

"He is dead! he is dead!" she moaned, "and I have killed him! Oh, Dick! Dick! my own, my darling, speak to me! Look up at me, dearest!" and she convulsively clung to his insinuate form.

"Hush, Inez!" and Mrs. Ives tenderly removed the weeping girl from her son's bedside, confiding her to Laura's care, whilst with the aid of the nurse whom she quickly summoned, she endeavoured to restore the unconscious man.

He had only fainted, from having over-exerted his strength and the excitement due on his again seeing Inez; but, fearing a more serious result on his revival, he was induced to say no more that day than to kiss the latter, and then once again compose himself to sleep.

And Inez waited, her life hanging on the life which was trembling in the balance, her lips pale as his, her hands as icy cold, when, having been assured that he was gently sleeping, she descended to where I was awaiting them in that cosy drawing-room.

"You must be very weary alone here!" Laura said, kindly, after having prevailed on the former to lie down on the sofa, "and you must think me worse than a barbarian not to have offered you any refreshments."

I assured her that I did not, and that I was not at all hungry, all the same that I was starving, having tasted nothing since we left London in the morning.

However, notwithstanding my protestations, she rang the bell, ordering that dinner should be served as quickly as possible, and a tray of cake and wine to be brought in immediately.

Inez, after having been persuaded to partake of something, was again comfortably ensconced amid the velvet cushions, eventually falling into a quiet sleep, whilst Laura and I conversed in an undertone, firstly concerning poor Dick, until our conversation drifted into another channel, the subject alone dealing with ourselves, Laura, for the time being, forgetting the brother coaxing on his bed of sickness, and the girl sobbing in her sleep on the couch, in our love for each other.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN AVERTED SIN.

NOTWITHSTANDING the order given by Laura, the servants at Hill House evidently did not intend putting themselves to any inconvenience by hurrying their operations in getting the dinner served before the usual hour, so it was nearly six o'clock before a neat parlour-maid appeared to inform us that it was on the table.

Inez still slept, and so gladly did I witness this relief to her feelings after the excitement through which she had recently passed that I would not consent to her being awake.

"You were quite right," Mrs. Ives said, on our telling her what we had done. "It may be the means of averting an illness, and I will give orders that she shall have something to tempt her to eat when she awakes."

The dinner passed off very quietly, each attempting for the sake of each to appear cheerful, whilst a cloud of gloom, as a pall, hung over all.

"Foolish boy," the former said, alluding to Dick, when we once again were alone, the servants having withdrawn after placing the dessert, "if he had only done at the first what he did in



the end this trouble to all parties might have been saved; instead of which he gives me years in which a troubled conscience never gave me rest, and I fought a continued battle between my sense of right and my mother's love, almost wrecking the happiness of your sister's life. Of course, you know all about it!" she added.

I averred my ignorance, not caring to make them aware how I attained the knowledge of which I was really possessed, through the letter I had purloined, and being completely in the dark with respect to recent *dénouements*; whilst Laura, who was evidently supposed to have enlightened me, blushed to the roots of her hair at the recollection of the other theme which had engrossed our attention, and Mrs. Ives was about to tell me, when a servant entered to request she would go to Mr. Dick's room, he having awoken.

"You had better see to your sister," she said, rising from the table. "He will, I am sure, be all anxiety to see her."

The drawing-room, on our entering, was just as I remembered it when, on a previous visit, Laura and I had pledged to each other our faith; the warm glow of the fire, for the days were still cold, threw a shade of comfort over it, and on the sofa, where we had left her, Inez still slept.

I stayed for a moment, thinking how beautiful she looked, the tresses of her golden hair having become unloosed fell in all their luxuriance on the ruby velvet in lovely contrast, whilst the deep, dark fringes of her closed eyes rested on the marble pallor of her cheek.

"Is she not lovely?" asked Laura, who had advanced to where I stood, when a clatter falling on the steel hearth caused her to awake with a start.

"Is that you, Claude?" she asked, suddenly rising up. "What a long time I must have slept! It is quite dark."

"Yes, dear, you were over fatigued," said Laura, who moved gently towards her. "And now you must have something to eat," where, ringing the bell, she would take no denial to Inez partaking of the little *recherche* dinner she had ordered.

And the latter obeyed, a sad smile passing over her features as Laura tempted her first with one delicacy, then with another.

"It would make Dick worse knowing you were making yourself ill," she said; "and, besides, you will want all your strength to nurse him back to health."

So after a while she was allowed once more to enter the sick chamber, where Dick lay anxiously awaiting her.

An improvement was visible on his awaking, and to his earnest entreaties Mrs. Ives had consented that Inez should come and sit with him, on condition he would not excite himself.

So, with the dim light of a shaded lamp, and the warm shadows thrown by the fire over wall and furniture, Inez sat by his bedside, her hand clasped in his, whilst her golden head rested on the pillow beside his own, and she listened to the story which was to make their lives one.

Mrs. Ives had gone out, beckoning to the nurse to follow her example, and leave them alone—those two to whom a new life was opening—not wishing that another should witness the sanctity of that reunion.

For some time both remained silent—the recovered happiness too great for words, their hearts alone beating with tumultuous joy in the transcendent bliss of those happy moments.

"You do not doubt me now, darling?" said Dick, whilst his hand passed lovingly over her golden tresses.

"Is it true then," she asked, "really true, that I am, indeed, your—"

"Wife. Yes, my own, my darling wife," he returned before she had time to complete her sentence; and then he told her how, when a wild young fellow, he had met a young girl named Helena Wray; how in those days he fancied he loved her, and in a mad moment had married her, not awakening until too late to learn the mistake he had made.

She, a wild, wilful girl, possessed of extraordinary beauty, but of low parentage, had no

sooner entered into a secret marriage, under the promise of its remaining so, than she declared her determination that the same should be made known to their respective friends.

"I tried by power of the love which she had avowed for me," continued Dick, "to dissuade her from her purpose, knowing full well the blow it would be to my mother, whilst I made a home for her and myself as soon as I was able in a place where we could happily live together."

"At first she was furious, but at last consented, provided the tie between us should not be concealed from her parents. I consented, and having my own resources unfettered wholly at my own disposal, I took a small villa, in which I established my wife, it not being at too great a distance from the college."

"For a time I was happy, the girl in her passionate love holding me her complete slave, whilst her beauty enraptured my senses; but after a while I began to weary of her caresses—a beautiful creature without soul, and no power to hold me captive but the splendour of her form and the faultlessness of her features."

He waited for a few seconds, whilst Inez bid him slip from the glass she held to his lips, when his head again rested on the pillow, and he continued,—

"Then came a fearful time for both. The small-pox was raging in the district, and Helena fell a victim to the loathsome disease. For days the doctors gave no hope of her recovery, and she even prayed for death, knowing in her agony of mind that with her beauty my love would die. But Heaven decreed otherwise—my poor girl lived; but oh! so changed—no trace left of her former self. And whilst I did not love I pitied, sorely pitied her; but she saw the change in me I endeavoured valiantly to hide, and she became wild in her misery, threatening to take her own life, when she had no longer anything to live for."

"In her despair she left my home, returning to her own people, and on her reiterated refusal to return to me or my home, I sold up the latter and came here. After that I met you, Inez; and then, and not till then, I learnt the true lesson of love, and, villain that I was, I induced you to leave your home with me as, I then thought, a married man."

A sob she vainly attempted to smother broke from Inez, but, quickly recovering herself, her hand closed round that of her companion.

"But Heaven was more tender in its mercy, Inez; for at the time I placed the ring on your finger before God's altar Helena was dead."

"Dead, and you did not know it, Dick?"

"No, love! Her people, thinking still to draw the quarterly money I had allowed her; kept her death a secret from me until last Christmas. When you fled from me, I determined to ascertain if she really lived. I had written to my mother some time previously, telling her how I regretted the part I had acted towards you and your innocence. Knowing from my agents that I was living abroad, Mrs. Wray, Helena's mother, was greatly astonished when I presented myself to her; and, after ascertaining from her guilty manner that her daughter was no longer living, she at last, by dint of threats, confessed that she had died almost immediately on her return to them. And so, Inez, my darling, you were ever my true wife. Can you forgive me?" and he raised his eyes beseechingly to hers.

But her only answer was a tender loving kiss on those fevered lips, and then the reunion of soul to soul.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A NEW LIFE.

SPRING glided into summer, the soft June breezes entering at the open windows, and the roses hanging their pink-hued heads, whilst they filled the air with their fragrance, before Dick Ives was restored to his usual health.

For weeks, long weeks of agony and suspense to the watchers by his bedside, he lay hovering between life and death; in his delirium passing through the misery of those nine long years, until at length the crisis was past, the wearied

brain found relief in a long, profound sleep, and he awoke to life.

I had returned to Ludham, leaving Inez behind, who could not be prevailed upon to quit her husband's side until with her he was able to travel so far.

After a consultation, respecting the purport of which we took Mrs. Ives into our confidence, we had decided not to enlighten my father further than to say that Dick and Inez were reunited, begging him, on account of the former's serious illness, not to tell him at present the sufferings to which his wife had been exposed during their estrangement.

A month had passed since I left Hill House, and with the French window wide open I and my father sat enjoying the soft summer air and the fragrant cigars—a box of which I had brought from London—whilst little Claude, on the tip-toe of expectation, eagerly awaited the arrival of his parents, who were due about that time; and although I appeared to smoke as calmly as the old gentleman, I was in an equal state of excitement with the thoughts of meeting my darling.

But we hadn't to wait long, Claude rushing from the farther gate where he had gone to watch to tell us when they were coming; and soon after a carriage drove up, and I almost fell in stepping outside as I hastily advanced to give them a welcome.

Dick was the first to alight, and, I am sorry to say, sufficiently ungallant as to leave the ladies to my tender mercies, whilst he clasped his boy to his bosom.

He was still pale from his recent illness, but with such a happiness beaming over his countenance as it did one good to look on.

"Papa, papa!" shouted the child, whilst he twined his arms around his father's neck, only releasing him to leap into those of Inez—Inez, grown so beautiful within those last few weeks—weeks in which she seemed to have recovered all the vivacity and happiness of her former youth, and then they all went into the house, my Laura leaning lovingly on me, while I whispered to her of the bliss in store for us.

And on that evening, when we all assembled, my thoughts wandered back, and in my fancy I saw my twin sister as I saw her then, with the snowflakes falling around her slender form, and the sad, weary look in her beautiful eyes, until a soft hand on my shoulder aroused me from my reverie, and I turned round to see her beaming face smiling into mine.

"Shall we have some music, dear?" she asked, and on my assenting she moved to the piano, beginning the opening bars to a duet we had often sung together in the far past.

Laura's and my wedding was fixed for a fortnight hence, and during the interval we did not see much of the ladies, who were deeply engaged in the intricacies of lace and orange blossoms, mysterious boxes of every description arriving from London.

"And you do not fear you will regret your choice?" I asked, as the day drew near, and Laura and I were taking our customary walk in the soft moonlight.

"Why do you ask, Claude?" she answered. "You can never be less to me than now, darling."

"Heaven bless you, my sweet love!" I replied. "I would sacrifice my life rather than give you an hour's pain."

"The sun does not always shine in the brightest climes," she answered. "We cannot expect our lives to pass without a cloud; but, Claude," she continued, "do you not think Dick should know now of the trouble through which Inez passed, for he seemed puzzled when little Claude told him the other day that he was found in the snow?"

"I had hoped the child had forgotten all about it. Perhaps it would be better that there should be no secrets now."

And so on that night Inez knew from her husband's lips that he had been told all her sad story.

"And yet you forgave me!" he asked, drawing her closer to him.

"Through all I loved you, Dick, my husband!"



SO WRAPT UP WERE THEY IN EACH OTHER THAT THEY WERE UNCONSCIOUS OF MY PRESENCE.

A few days later and the bells of Ludham Church rang out a merry peal. There was great excitement amongst the townfolk, and little children dressed in white, holding baskets from which roses peeped through leaves of emerald green, were ranged each side of the gravel path leading to the sacred porch.

The sun shone out with a brilliant July heat, and again another and another peal sounded in the summer air when two carriages drove up, each with their white horses, and the coachmen decked with large white favours.

Then a loud hurrah and Heaven bless them rang from the assembled throng when the bride, a veil of Honiton lace falling over her dark hair, stepped forth leaning on the arm of my father, followed by two little girls to act as bridesmaids, and a little fellow dressed as a tiny page holding her train of rich satin.

In the next carriage were Dick, Inez, and myself, for whom another cheer was given, and then for a time the bells ceased, to burst out again with renewed vigour when we emerged from the sacred edifice, my darling on my arm, with whom I stood on the threshold of a new life.

#### CONCLUSION.

TEN years have again sped their course, and once more I am seated with my chair drawn close to a huge fire, whilst the snow-flakes dance in the wintry air, and are blown up against the window pane; but I merely turn my head with a sense of comfort stealing over me, as I contrast the scene without with that of warmth within. I am master now of the old house, my father having joined the large majority five years since, and the voices of merry children now resound within its walls. Yes, and without too, for here come a troop of happy youngsters over the fresh strewn snow; and one tiny face, surrounded by a halo of golden hair, looks through the soft veiled panes on me, with those blue eyes of hers reminding me of other eyes so like, which came

to me through that very window ten long years since; and as I rise to let her in, baby Inez throws her arms around me, pressing her icy-cold face to mine, whilst two young gentlemen in knickerbockers follow quickly on, their red hands laden with holly and mistletoe wherewith to decorate my sanctum.

Then the door on the otherside opens, and a lady enters—a sweet, pale-faced matron with dark velvety eyes, which gleam with redundant happiness as they fall on the scene before her. She bears an open letter in her hand, which she had come with the intention of reading to me, but passes it instead into my hands with a loving smile, whilst she duly admires the scarlet berries and white, as the bundles are held up for her inspection, and her aid solicited in the task of ornamentation on the morrow.

"You will help us mamma darling, won't you?" and Jack, our eldest boy, throws his arms around his mother's neck.

"Don't you think it better to wait until Uncle Dick and Cousin Claude come," she asked, which brings a pont for a second or two to the pretty lips of baby Inez; but when I read aloud from the letter that the latter is looking forward with pleasure to the aid he will give the children in their usual Christmas decorations to which he intended contributing a number of Chinese lanterns, a happy smile plays over each youthful countenance at the prospect before them, for Cousin Claude, having attained the mature age of thirteen, always looks upon them as babies, and had even been heard on one occasion to designate them as kids.

And the next day came bright and clear, a brilliant sun shining over the white unsoiled snow, when three little noses are pressed against the window, intently and patiently awaiting the arrival of their manly cousin, and as a carriage is seen to approach a chorus of joyous voices and tramping feet arouse me to a sense that something unusual had taken place.

We look up at the sound—Laura and I—and then we know that Dick and Inez, not forgetting

Claude, are within our walls, and we hasten to welcome them to our Christmas hearth.

Inez, still youthful in appearance, although she declares we are both old; a fact I cannot allow, notwithstanding my forty years and grey hair which, ill-natured people say, show themselves very conspicuously amid my raven locks, whilst my sister's golden tresses are silky and abundant as of yore.

"Mother hoped you would not think it unkind," I hear Dick telling my wife, "but she does not feel able now to travel as she says she did twenty years ago, and could not undertake the journey," so we had to make ourselves happy in the absence of grandmamma, who had not forgotten that the Santa Claus of her youth was equally in vogue with the youth of the present day; and a few hours later, when the children went to bed, little stockings were duly suspended, to be as duly filled by that generous-minded individual.

But the happy evening at last draws to an end. The voices of the choir, warbling a carol in the frosty night, holds us all wrapt in silence, recalling to my mind as it ever did the painful past, but my gloomy thoughts soon vanish, and the last notes die away, when looking at the same ornate clock which has ticked incessantly during these long ten years.

Long ten years did I say! No, short as a summer's dream in the love and happiness they have brought me! But I must put aside those memories of mingled joy and misery, for looking I see it is on the stroke of twelve, and I know by bitter experience that Johnson (for he is with us still) will be in to the moment to open the window to Father Christmas at the appointed time, regardless of the cruel wind or the driving snow.

And here he is, punctual as of old. I can hear the jingle of glasses, and knowing I shall be called upon to do "the customaries" succumb to my fate, cheerful as any of that happy assembly, whilst I join in their Christmas greetings—whilst the ring of happy laughter resounds through the room.

[THE END.]





"I THOUGHT I WAS RIGHT! YOU OWE ME EXACTLY TWENTY-FIVE POUNDS!" SAID CAPTAIN MARSTON.

## THE LOST STAR.

### CHAPTER XXL

"Mr dear Ruby," said Lady Augusta Craven, as she lounged on a sofa in the handsome drawing-room of —, Hyde Park gardens, with a shawl wrapped round her shoulders, and a tiger skin thrown over her feet. "I feel convinced, in spite of everything you say, that I should greatly prefer you to this charming sister of yours. You are twins, I believe, and very much alike, therefore you have the same advantages of person."

Ruby shook her head.

"And from what I hear, all the advantages of character are on your side."

"Indeed, you are mistaken. If you had only let me bring Violet with me, you would have seen what a mistake you make."

"I don't believe it. Listen to me, for contradiction is a thing I never could endure. Send Violet to Lady Chester's in your place, and come and take compassion on me. It won't be a bad home for you; Sir Arthur and I never quarrel, and I will introduce you at once to the best society."

"You are very good," and the life looked fair enough to Ruby's eyes, "but nothing could induce me to let Violet work instead of me."

"Fiddlesticks! Is the girl made of better stuff than you? If it doesn't do her all the good in the world I shall be very much surprised. Let her try it, at all events, and if she doesn't get on with the Chesters we can send her somewhere else," and Lady Augusta leant back with a satisfied air, as if she had comfortably settled the matter.

Accustomed to the servile obedience of Indian servants, she seemed to expect utter deference to her wishes from relations and friends, and the slightest opposition roused both surprise and anger. Ruby found herself in a position of some difficulty, for she was naturally unwilling to

offend her aunt at their first meeting, and yet determined to stand by her sister at all hazards.

After a minute's reflection, she asked whether Lady Augusta had ever come across a Captain Marston at Bombay.

Lady Augusta smiled as at some amusing reminiscence.

"Yes! The veriest rake I ever knew. He isn't a friend of yours, I hope!"

"He was engaged to Violet last year; but my father broke it off."

"I should think he did! If he knew as much as I do, I should think he would have helped him out of the house with as hard a kick as ever he had in his life. But what made him take a fancy to Violet?"

"Everyone does, she is so charming," Lady Augusta looked politely incredulous. "It would never do for her to go to Chester Chase, for he comes there constantly."

"That is an objection, especially if she is sentimental about him still. I daresay he has forgotten her long ago."

"That he hasn't. He begs and implores me to give him her address."

"Don't give it him, my dear."

"Not for the world; but any day he may find her out, and that is one reason why I long to place her in a home where she would be taken care of."

"I am not particularly anxious to play the part of policeman, detective, or keeper to my niece, and I am perfectly satisfied that you are exactly the girl to suit me; but, still, if you like to send her here to be looked at one day next week, I will see if I can put up with her instead."

"Thank you very much!" and Ruby rose to depart, feeling as if her point was already gained; for was there any person in the world who could look upon Violet's sweet face and ask for anything more.

"Don't run away yet. Your train does not start till five o'clock, and the carriage shall take you to Paddington."

"But I must go round by Chatterton-street,

and I could not take your carriage into such a neighbourhood as that."

"My carriage will go wherever I like to send it. Ring the bell, there's a good child, and I'll order it in half-an-hour. I wish you would wait for a cup of tea."

"What would Violet think of me if I came to London without seeing her?" and she smiled as she thought how she had probably taken her place at the window soon after luncheon to see if she were coming. If there was one thing she was sure of on earth, it was Violet's affection.

At the imposing carriage and pair drove up to the door of 23, Chatterton-street, and an august footman deigned to rattle the shabby knocker, heads were put out of windows in every direction and the fortunate mistress of the house went up sky high in the estimation of her neighbours.

As soon as the door was opened, Ruby ran upstairs to meet Mrs. Capel on the staircase, who stared at her in evident amazement.

"Mersey on us, Miss Ruby, what has happened?"

"Nothing, only I want to see my sister, and haven't a moment to spare," and breathless with her run, she took the kindly old woman's hand, and shook it heartily.

"Your sister, miss!" with round eyes, full of astonishment. "Why, bless my soul! what's the meaning of it?"

"Come in to the sitting-room, and let me explain."

Ruby followed her into the room where she had spent such a happy Christmas Day with her sister, and its unexpected emptiness sent a chill to her heart. "Where is she?" she asked eagerly.

"Gone to see you; at least, as I'm a living woman I thought she said so."

"There must be some mistake, for I sent her a telegram yesterday afternoon, to tell her not to come."

"She had it sure enough; for I was out, and Mary Ann told me how she had brought it in on the tea-tray; but whatever can she be doing so

long and so late as this!" knitting her brows together.

"It is not very late, after all. Tell her to write to me directly she comes in, to console me for my disappointment, and give her my love and these violets. They don't look lively, but I think they will revive in water."

"I will put them in at once. Dear, dear! how mad she will be at missing you."

"Not half so mad as I feel at losing her, because, after all, she can't have expected me. I can't understand it, but I mustn't wait, I suppose," stopping still at the top of the stairs, "she never does stay out late when she is by herself!"

"Oh, dear! no, miss; she is quite as particular as you could be yourself in a general way. That's a beautiful carriage at the door; may I be so bold as to ask if it is Lady Augusta's?"

"Yes, my aunt sent me in it to the station. Will you tell my sister that she is to go and see her one day next week! Don't forget." Then with a kindly nod, Ruby ran downstairs, stepped into the carriage, said "Paddington" to the footman, and drove off.

Rather uneasy on Violet's account, she kept looking out of the window, in the hope of catching sight of her. Amongst the passers-by there were well-dressed ladies, with frilled petticoats only just above the reach of the mud; shabby, woe-begone sempstresses, struggling with parcels which were almost as big as themselves; blue-bloused butcher-boys, with their greasy trays over their shoulders; nursery-maids, with the inevitable perambulator, making incursions on the toes of the unwary policemen looking out for a job; pickpockets intent upon their natural means of subsistence; but amongst the stream of old and young, rich and poor, there was no Violet, so the streets might have been empty to the eyes that watched in vain.

A hansom cab followed close upon Lady Augusta's brougham, but whether accidentally or intentionally Ruby did not care to wonder. When she reached the station, the cab drew up at the same time, and a man with his arm in a sling, got out.

With a sudden feeling of shyness, she walked quickly through the booking-office, on to the platform. Steps followed her closely, but she would not look round, and hurried on as if her only object were to look at an advertisement at the end.

"Are you going to invest in some of that stuff?" said a voice which made her heart beat most unconsciously fast. "I believe it is very good."

"What!" her eyes opened with astonishment, for she was perfectly unconscious of the fact that she had taken up her position in front of a peculiarly attractive poster.

"Haven't you dragged me the whole length of the platform to see it?" letting his eyes rest upon her blushing face, in a manner that bewildered her greatly.

"No, I have dragged you nowhere! Are you going down to the Chase?"

"Not just yet, the doctors won't let me. How are you getting on without me?"

"Just the same as when you were there."

"I thought you were one of the few women who tell the truth."

"What would you have me say! Did you ever help me to teach, to walk, to sing or play. That is all I have to do, and I need no assistance."

"At least I put as much variety as I could into the monotony of your existence," and his eyes twinkled mischievously under their half-closed lids. "I, enraged, excited, soothed, and frightened."

"Frightened!" she echoed, with an attempt at disdain.

"Yes, I have seen you shake and shiver whilst your proud little head went up, and you would rather have died than lower it. Ruby, there is no use denying it," and he stooped to watch her face, "but whatever it is you feel for me—its name is not indifference."

"Then perhaps it is dislike!" and she tried to look it if it were.

"And perhaps it is not."

There was a pause, which soon became to her so annoyingly oppressive that she was obliged to break it.

"Is your arm any better?"

"No. Pages thinks rather badly of it—talks a lot of nonsense about the necessity of keeping it still, and wants me to lead the life of a bed-ridden old man, which I can't specially as you wouldn't come and see me. If I were really bad, would you conquer your scruples and come?"

"Not unless you were at the last gasp," and she looked away from him across the bewildering maze of iron lines.

In fancy she saw him paler, more fragile, a thousand times than he was now, his head supported by several pillows, and the dew of death gathering on his brow. Would she ever see him like that?

"You thought I was dying once," he said, softly, and every pulse seemed to beat with shame and indignation.

"Lord Alverley, what brought you here this afternoon?"

"A hansom—and you. I went to Hyde Park-gardens; and your aunt, like the good-natured woman that she is, told me where to find you."

"Do you know her?" in surprise.

"I do; so that if ever you desert us and live with her, as she tells me she hopes you will, I shall be one of her most constant visitors. After all, it may be more convenient for our friendship than a lengthened stay at the Chase. You mayn't snub me so unmercifully."

"There's the bell," and she started forward.

"No hurry, the guard is a great friend of mine; and so long as he sees me on the platform he is sure to wait. In here!" as she stopped before a second-class carriage. "It is empty, that is one good thing, but you must have a foot-warmer."

He called for one, saw that it was put in, shut the door, leaned his arm on the window, and threw a small packet into her lap.

"Don't open it till you get to the Chase!"

"But what is it?"

"Only yourself as you seem to me. Give me your hand. Oh, Ruby, my darling! that soft white hand," he murmured, *softly* as he clasped it close. "I sometimes think it must be my own," he added, with a smile, as she caught it hastily, away. "Remember your promise."

"Release me," she begged very earnestly, "it weighs so terribly on my mind."

"Not if I know it. Even if you would rather ask the old gentleman himself to help you, you must send for me!"

He raised his hat as the train moved off, and waved his hand with a mischievous smile.

She leaned forward eagerly.

"Mind you take care of your arm."

She could not tell whether he had heard or no; but a sudden fear darted through her heart, when she noticed how very pale he was—when the smile, which she had brought there, died away from eyes and lips.

With no one to look after him, was he likely to take care? And if he did not take care, and the surgeon's warnings were well-grounded, what would be the probable consequence?

She shuddered at her own question, and was afraid to think of the answer.

The pony-carriage came to meet her.

The groom drove fast, but as they passed the lamp at the bottom of the station-hill, Ruby caught sight of a man lurking in the hedge.

Some instinct made her look over her shoulder, and she saw him, standing in the road, staring, as it seemed, at herself, but as soon as he caught her eye, he slunk back into the shadows.

He had dark moustaches and whiskers, that was all she could see; but something about the outline of his face and figure seemed strangely familiar, and all the way to the Chase she puzzled over his possible identity.

She would have been still more bewildered if she had known that it was he, who told Mr. Graves that a key was unnecessary for the undoing of her skates.

## CHAPTER XXII.

TEA was brought in as soon as Ruby went upstairs after her return to the Chase, so she took off her bonnet in a hurry, without waiting to wash her hands.

The children were not at home, so she was all by herself, and after she had poured out a cup of tea, she proceeded to unfasten the seal of Lord Alverley's small packet.

"What can it be!" she wondered, with a smile of amusement on her pretty lips. "An emblem of myself—a rose, with a double allowance of thorns!"

The paper fell off and displayed a morocco case. She pressed the spring, the lid flew open, and there, on a dark blue velvet lining, lay a lovely diamond star!

The colour rushed in to her cheeks—one deep-drawn breath of admiration—as she gazed admiringly at the glittering stones, which twinkled with a hundred rays of light, and then a profound sigh, as she pushed it away from her hurriedly.

"It must go back at once! How could he think that I should accept it!"

The toast lay untasted on her plate, as she leaned back in her chair, one bitter thought rising in quick succession after the other.

Certainly, she had succeeded very ill in keeping him at a distance, or he never would have presumed to offer it!

His manner to-day was strange, as he said good-bye; and the words he murmured, in a whisper, implied something more than friendship was running to his reckless brain. And, worse than all, she had forgotten to tell him that she entirely disapproved of clandestine correspondence.

Of course her silence had encouraged him, and he would begin to think that he could amuse himself with her as he liked.

How differently he would have acted if she had been still joint heiress with her sister to St. Heller's Mount! He would no more have dared to offer her a present than he would have ventured to ask the Queen herself to dance with him at a State ball!

Al! if she could only be as she was but one long year ago, mistress of such an assured position that no one could approach her without respect, even if that respect were merged, as it often had been, in fervent admiration!

Then she would let Lord Alverley know that if he chose to fancy that he loved her—how her cheeks burnt at the thought!—he must claim her before the world.

No pretence of friendship would be needed then, but tongues could speak what the heart was longing to utter! And whatever the end might be, nothing clandestine should send a shadow over its purity.

With a frown she looked at the glittering star; but, womanlike, she got up presently from her chair to see what it would look like in her "bonnie brown hair."

Nothing was ever so becoming as the sheen of diamonds, and she could not help smiling at her own reflection—it looked so wondrous fair!

As she stood there, with the smile on her lips and the star in her hair, the door opened, and Anna came in with a tray.

"Please miss, Mrs. Nicholson thought you would like a poached egg."

Ruby started, and with crimson cheeks, snatched the jewels out of her curls.

"Thank her very much; but I am not hungry."

"There it is; so you can eat it if you like," and the maid withdrew after placing the egg on the table, and casting a curious glance at the jewel-case lying on the cloth.

Tired as she was, Ruby lost no time in packing up the beautiful star, as if in a hurry to be rid of it.

To-morrow she must send it off in a registered packet, and it seemed a tremendous time to wait.

So long as it was in the house it destroyed her peace, and she could not think of the giver without a pang. Yet, conscious of her own proud innocence, she felt inclined to defy anyone



to think of her less highly than he ought to think.

One look in her face would surely tell him that Ruby St. Hellers, poverty-stricken, homeless, friendless as she might be, was not a girl to be trifled with by any man alive.

If Lord Alverley would be her friend that was all very well; but if he wished to go one step farther, then there must be an end of everything "under the rose."

Lost in thought, she sat before the fire, idly watching the jets of flame. There the children found her when they rushed in, flushed and excited, to tell her what a happy day they had had, and how they wanted to show her the lovely golden pheasants in a cage, as big as a house.

"And we had such a cake at tea! Better than we ever get here; so I put a bit in my pocket for you," and Beatrice climbed on her knee. "But May would sneeze when we were down in the drawing room, and, of course, she had lost her pocket-handkerchief, so I had to give her mine."

"And as she pulled it out," broke in May, bursting with laughter, "the cake jumped out too, and mamma was so shocked, and put the skirt of her dress over it, to hide it."

"That wouldn't have mattered," said Bee, scornfully. "I had to wait a dreadful time, till mamma said 'good bye,' so a nasty big dog got hold of it first, and I couldn't stop him. The greedy thing ate up every bit of it, even the crumbs."

"It was very kind of you to think of me; but perhaps the poor thing was hungry; and, you see, I have had my tea." Ruby smiled as she stroked her hair.

"Yes; but our cakes never have half enough plums in them; I believe Anna pulls them out on the way. Don't you hate Anna, Miss Sellers?"

"My dear child, I hope I don't hate anyone; and certainly not a girl whom I know so little of."

"She hates you," and Beatrice gave a knowing nod; "she looks at you as if she could eat you."

"So did you at the cake, but you didn't hate it."

"No. I wish I could see it again."

"And did your sister come?" asked May, opening her sleepy eyes with sudden interest.

"No, dear; I had to go to town to-day."

"I am so glad," with a big yawn; "because then we shall see her too. If she is like you, we will keep her here a prisoner."

"Yes," said Beatrice, clapping her hands; "then there will be two Miss Sellers instead of one; and I'll have you, and May shall have the other!"

"That you shan't!" and with all her might May tried to push her sister off Ruby's lap. "You've belonged to me from the first, haven't you?" with an appealing glance into her face.

"To both of you, I think," and Ruby drew the two little girls close to her; "and so long as I am with you I hope you will be as fond of me as you are now. Go to bed, little sleepy-heads, and get up quite fresh in the morning."

They clung to her neck so tightly that she could scarcely free herself from their embrace; and when they were gone, and she heard their small feet pattering down the passage, she returned to her dreams, soothed and comforted by their childish affection. After all there was some sunshine in her lot, though most of her path might be shadowed by a cloud.

She looked round for a novel in which she was much interested, and caught sight of a small object lying on the floor. She picked it up, and turned it over curiously. It was a box of cigarettes, such as most men carry in their pockets. But what man had been there to drop it in her private sanctum? It was near the sofa, as if he had been sitting there, or, at least, close by it; and yet it was scarcely possible that anyone would have intruded in her absence—most improbable in fact. But there was the box, which could scarcely have been dropped by any of the maids! How did it get there? A vague uneasiness crept over her. She felt as if something had been going on behind her back which she ought to find out.

There was no mark on the box by which to

identify it! There might be a score just like it in the house. At that moment a thought struck her—footmen are much addicted to smoking when the eye of the butler is not on them, and perhaps one of the men had brought up a scuttle of coals to oblige the housemaid. That seemed the most probable solution of the mystery. And relieved from an indefinite fear, Ruby took up her book, and soon lost herself in its contents.

There was an unusual commotion in the house, doors banged, hurried footsteps moved to and fro, whispered conversations were held in the corridors; she became aware of it, after a time, and laid down her novel to listen. But as soon as she had begun to listen all was quiet, and she went to bed at last, perfectly unconscious of the event which was keeping Lady Chester wide-awake on her lace-bedrilled pillows.

It was not till late the next morning, when she was returning with the children from a walk to the post office—where she had sent off the rejected jewels in a registered packet to Lord Alverley—that she heard from Mrs. Nicholson the cause of the excitement.

Lady Chester had gone off in a hurry on the Thursday morning, and after taking out a ring she especially wished to wear, left the key in the lock of her dressing-case. She never thought of it again till her maid was brushing her hair, preparatory to retiring for the night, when her eye chanced to fall upon it. Horrified at her own carelessness, she looked through the contents to assure herself that nothing was missing, and found that a splendid diamond star, which she wore on grand occasions in the front of her Brussels lace head-dress, was nowhere to be seen. She hunted for it breathlessly, knowing that the Earl would be more inclined to scold than to sympathise, and would certainly tell her that diamond ornaments ought to be kept with the rest of the family-jewels in the strong-room downstairs.

When she first married she was so nervous at being the temporary possessor of all these priceless heirlooms, that she never forgot to have them locked up in their proper place; but after a while, the habit of wearing them made her less careful of them, and it worried her intensely to have to send for the keys of the strong-room every time that she wished to take out or replace any of her jewels.

She was, consequently, tempted to keep a few of them under her own eye in her bedroom; and the box which contained them was usually locked up in a corner of the wardrobe, and the keys hidden in a safe place.

"It was all because I was in such a hurry, and the Earl called out to me that the horses had stood quite long enough in the cold!"

And poor Lady Chester looked up in her maid's face with tears in her eyes.

"I shall never hear the last of it!"

"But, perhaps, my lady, you've made a mistake," said Parsons, encouragingly. "You see it was only the other night that you wore your best set of diamonds in your hair, and I think the star may have been put back with them."

The Countess shook her head.

"Send Nicholson to me," she said, hoarsely.

Mrs. Nicholson came in in a flurry.

"Good gracious me, my lady! What's this awful news I hear! How ever did the diamonds come to be left about! and who's took them, I should like to know!"

"Now don't!" and Lady Chester lifted her hand imploringly. "No one has taken them—only we can't find them."

Then she explained how they had been kept in the dressing-case, and how she had left the key in the lock.

"Which is, for all the world—asking your pardon, my lady—as if you had begged somebody to relieve you of them," rejoined the housekeeper, sententiously. "Now, the next question to be asked is, who knew that those diamonds were here!"

"Not a soul besides Parsons and myself."

"Are you quite sure that none of the maids—idle girls as most of them are—have been in with a letter, or a message, or a something, just as they were being put away!"

"I don't think so."

"Things can't walk of themselves. What time were the windows shut?"

"Just before our dinner," said Parsons, readily.

"I came up to put the satin skirt back in the wardrobe, and thought that the room had been aired long enough."

"And you started, my lady, at half-past ten?"

"Yes. I wish to Heaven I had never gone!"

"Two clear hours, and a half besides, for anyone to do what they liked in. I suppose one of the grooms had better be sent off to the police!"

"Oh, no; not for the world!" exclaimed the Countess, excitedly. "It must be in the room; we shall see it when the daylight comes."

"And meanwhile the thief may have started for New York!"

"Whatever happens, I can't tell the Earl to-night. I wonder what Miss St. Hellers would advise!" leaning her head on her hand in an attitude of despondency.

"She has been out of the house all day, so she knows nothing about it," said Mrs. Nicholson, quickly. "Don't you think, my lady, I had better go downstairs and ask his lordship for the key of the strong-room, so that we might see, at once, if it had been put away with the rest?"

"Not to-night," she pleaded, wearily. "He knows that I haven't worn any of my jewels to-day, and he would ask all sorts of questions. It is one o'clock already, and I feel as if I should die without my night's rest."

Very unwillingly Mrs. Nicholson gave in, and went back to her own bedroom in earnest consultation with Parsons.

When the next morning came nothing was to be seen of the star; and the Earl, who was in a great state of mind, had just ridden off to communicate the circumstances to the police, and ask if any suspicious characters had been seen in the neighbourhood.

When Ruby came home from her walk, she was naturally much disturbed at the thought of such a robbery having been committed in the house, and, unsuspecting of any evil consequences to herself, gave her full sympathy to the Countess.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

A LARGE bowl of violets cast a delicious perfume through the luxurious room where Lord Alverley was acting the part of an interesting invalid. He was lying on a sofa, padded and stuffed with more than usual consideration for the extreme of comfort. Over him were thrown a rug of Russian sable, and a wrap that had hung in crimson and golden splendour under the archway of an Eastern bazaar; whilst between himself and Captain Marston stood a low table, furnished with cards and dice. The walls were covered with pictures of lovely women, all in that most delicious stage of existence, when every charm is ripened to its fullest development of beauty, and the innocence of childhood is lost in the consciousness of exultant womanhood. Over the velvet-covered mantelpiece hung the sword which he had worn as Captain of the—shire Yeomanry, besides some others, which were of historic value, a pair of silver-mounted revolvers, every variety of hunting-knife, several guns of different manufactures, a lock of yellow hair tied with a silver ribbon, pipes of every description, and a faded ball-card—relic of some forgotten festivity. Photographs of the fashionable beauties and the most popular actresses stood in a row along the shelf.

A lamp, suspended from the ceiling, cast a mellow light over the room, and on the very different faces of the players. Lord Alverley had thrown himself back with an air of ennui, and was absently watching the cloud of smoke which rose from the tip of his cigarette, whilst Captain Marston was making arithmetical calculations on a scrap of paper.

He looked up, and stroked his black moustaches with the end of his gold pencil-case.

"I thought I was right. You owe me exactly twenty-five pounds, which rather more than cancels my losses to you last night. Let us play no more at present, I want to talk."

And, without waiting for an answer, he pushed away the table.

"All right," said Alverley, carelessly. "Just tell me the figure, so that Phillips can put it down."

"Scarcely worth the trouble, for when the other's taken off there's nothing left. Four-pound-ten, if you really wish to know. May I try one of these pipes; I am tired of cigars?"

"Better take the old cherry-wood—draws the best. The tobacco's in that Bohemian monotony to your right."

Captain Marston unhooked the pipe, filled it, felt in his pocket for his box of lights, and could not find it, recollected that he had mislaid it before, and made use of a cedar-wood match instead. Finding that the pipe deserved its owner's commendations, he drew a comfortable lounging chair nearer to Alverley, and sinking down on it, stretched out his feet to the fire. For a minute or two he puffed away meditatively, thinking of the innocent girl whom he had so cruelly deceived that very afternoon. The fascination of her beauty was about him still; her face had intervened between his eyes and the cards he held in his hand—her voice seemed to linger in his ears, even when Alverley was humming the chorus of some music-hall ditty.

"Have you done anything with that cottage of yours down at Twickenham?" he asked, after a pause, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe.

"Done anything? What do you mean? If you want to know if I've been there lately I can tell you no," with a shiver. "Nothing would induce me."

"I thought perhaps you had parted with it. It is as snug a little place as I ever saw. I should like to run down there for a fortnight."

"I daresay you will find a slug on the drawing-room table, and a frog in the coal-scuttle. I believe such things are always happening."

"We'll put them in the fire and add to the blaze."

"We! I took it for granted you were going there alone."

"Why? You never did yourself."

"True! but love amongst the roses seems more natural than spooning amongst the slugs."

"So long as the spooning answers, I don't think the natural history matters much; but this is an exceptional case, and has the charms of a first experiment."

"Why exceptional?"

"If you had seen her," with a slight smile, "you would know. But anyhow you can imagine that she is something out of the way, when you hear that she has tempted me to the cold bath of matrimony."

The cigarette fell from Lord Alverley's hand. "You don't say so!" he exclaimed, in unbounded astonishment. "Why have you never shown her to me?"

"I wouldn't have let you see her for the world," and Marston gave a short laugh. "She is so like your last *memorata*, that you would have made love to her on the spot."

"Who do you call 'my last'?" leaning forward, and looking at him curiously.

"Ruby St. Hellers," with a sharp glance at the pale, refined face.

"Then you never were more mistaken in your life!" and Lord Alverley leant back with an expression of sleepy indifference. "A good little girl with a fair share of beauty, but a thousand times too prudish and straitlaced to suit my fancy. Imogen Dayncourt is more to my taste."

"What a consummate humbug you are, old fellow!" and Captain Marston, vastly amused, jumped up from his chair, and leant his back against the mantelpiece. "You really seem to think that I am as blind as a bat!"

"Not at all; only you seem to have a double sort of sight, which makes you see what is not to be seen."

"What is not meant to be seen, I grant you. I was not meant to see that feminine pocket-handkerchief which was dropped at your side that night we were all out with the poachers!"

Not the quiver of an eyelash betrayed the inward perturbation of Alverley's soul. He knew nothing of Ruby's handkerchief, beyond a vague remembrance that she had wiped his forehead with something that was scented with *san de Cologne*.

"That handkerchief!" he said, sleepily; "I think somebody must have dropped it in the room. I know it came in very conveniently for wiping the blood off my sleeves. Did it belong to Miss St. Hellers?"

"It did; and she did not deny it."

"Why should she?—unless it had a hole in it!"

"Most young ladies would have objected to its being found in such a position."

"Poor thing! when she had probably passed through the room half-a-dozen times in the day! She never told me it was hers, or I might have apologised for using it. Is that all you can fish up against her!"

Captain Marston stroked his moustaches thoughtfully. He knew as a matter of fact that Alverley was devoted to Ruby, but all his proofs seemed to vanish before his calm impassibility.

"Anyone could see on Christmas Eve that your game of chess was a mere pretence for a flirtation."

"My dear fellow, when I flirt I do so openly, and let all the world laugh if they feel disposed to. The game, as a scientific display, was certainly a pretence, for my arm hurt me so confoundingly that I could scarcely recollect the moves."

"Then why attempt to play?"

"Because I had been bored to death by Lady Fanny. I tell you honestly that I should have enjoyed a flirtation with Miss St. Hellers if she had not seemed so shocked at my first attempt! But you had better drop the joke, for the mere suggestion of such an idea would be enough to make her pack up her trunks and be off like a shot. I believe that brother of mine gave her a hint that I was an awful scamp."

"Harold is a bit of a prig. Pity he didn't go into the church!"

"Don't agree with you. His place is the saddle—not the pulpit. But how about Mrs. Marston. What's her name?"

"Not to be known till after the ceremony is over."

"Ah! a runaway match! Take care she's not under age."

"Trust me not to take a leap in the dark!"

"I could trust you, but how about the girl?"

"She knows what she's about. Besides, it is an old affair renewed."

"The mystery deepens. What church! and who is the best man?"

"We have fixed on a registry-office as the more convenient."

"Whew! Then the lady is what is called 'advanced.' Come, Marston, out with it! What harm can you do by telling me? I think I ought to make it a condition of lending you the house."

"No, no! that has nothing to do with it."

"But I ought to know what she is like. I couldn't stand a woman with red hair lolling on my sofas and chairs."

"She hasn't red hair."

"Is she pretty? Is she as good to look at as that woman over there!" nodding with his head towards the picture of a lovely girl playing with a bunch of poppies in her lap.

"Better. Because that girl is thinking of herself all the while her eyes are fixed on you; whilst Vi—"

"Is her name Violet?" broke in Lord Alverley, quickly, as his thoughts reverted immediately to Miss St. Hellers' selfish sister.

"Violante, I think; but I can't be quite sure."

"Not sure!" incredulously.

"No, because I always call her Vi. Is your arm hurting you?" adroitly changing the subject.

"You look as if you ought to be in bed."

"So Paget says; but if I attended to him I should be bored to death."

"Well, take care of yourself; you look as if it had happened already."

"Bored or dead?"

"Both."

"Ah! I never was such a robust-looking fellow as Harold," looking critically at the slender hand which held his cigarette.

Marston made no reply, but moved slowly to the door.

Alverley called after him—

"I suppose I had better drop a line to Mrs. Parkinson to furnish up the cottage at once. Fires ought to be lighted in the rooms and kept up all night, for I shouldn't like your bride to snub your first embrace with a sneeze."

"Thanks; you are very good. But there's no hurry. Send for me, you know, if you want me."

"Then you are not going to stay with those people after all!"

"No; it was a case of 'friendship versus love'; you can guess which went to the wall. Ta-ta!"

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

WHILST Lord Alverley was risking his health, in foolish rebellion against the doctor's orders, and thinking of Ruby with a peralateny that surprised himself; whilst Captain Marston, only listening to the wild dictates of passion, was laying a trap for a girl's bright innocence—a trap which was to be broken as easily as a spider's web if the charm went off the gathered flower, or if love lasted as long as life, was to bind her by a chain to his side; whilst Violet herself, unconscious of the abyss towards which her unwary footsteps were tending, was lost in a dream of delight; the household at the Chase was in a state of suspense and suppressed excitement.

Most of the servants had been called up to the Earl's study and subjected to an unofficial examination, which frightened those whose guilty consciences warned them of sundry half-forgotten peccadilloes; but had elicited nothing which threw any light on the subject in question. The loss of the diamond star remained a mystery; and Parsons, who felt that it reflected some dishonour on herself as the Countess's maid, went about the house with an air of subdued woe, much as if she had lost a near relation of whom she was not particularly fond, but for whom she was in duty bound to mourn.

Lady Chester had gone into hysterics half-a-dozen times already, and was prepared to do it again at the slightest provocation.

Lady Clementina took to locking her bedroom door at night, and had a more secure fastening put upon her shutters. She also suggested that two or three men from the county police-station should be detailed to guard the premises at night; and having given her advice, and done her best to defend herself, she resumed her usual air of equanimity.

The Earl consulted with his brother magistrates, and had the county scoured for suspicious characters, in consequence of which an itinerant tinkler, and a gipsy on his way to a north-country fair, were seized by the police and dragged before the bench; but as nothing could be proved against either of them, they were dismissed with a severe rebuke.

Harold was sent for. The mysterious stranger, who had appeared on the ice, and followed them so persistently to the house, was inquired after; but no one seemed to remember anything about him, and the police could throw no light on his movements.

A number of strangers had come over for the skating; and it was probable that he had gone away the same evening, and not returned, as the frost broke up the next day.

"The strange thing is that the fellow seemed to know Miss St. Hellers," said Harold, thoughtfully. "At least, he told Graves how to take off her skates, when he was at a loss."

"How very extraordinary!" and the Countess opened her eyes. "Have you mentioned it to her?"



"No; it was the day of her accident, and I never saw her afterwards."

"Mind you ask her this evening."

Ruby was very much surprised to see Harold, when she came into the drawing-room after dinner; and puzzled beyond measure at the account of a stranger who seemed to have some mysterious connection with herself.

"I cannot imagine who it was," she said, after a pause. "I know so few people about here, and all whom I am acquainted with are still better known to yourselves."

"But he need not belong to this neighbourhood; I am sure, on the contrary, that he didn't."

"He could scarcely have come all the way from Devonshire."

"Why not? Men are moveable. Do you know of anyone there who would answer to his description?"

"It is rather vague, isn't it?" she said, with a smile. "Black moustaches and whiskers—that is all you have told me."

"Yes; but these whiskers were unusually long, and the fellow had a peculiar voice and accent."

"I remember now, being struck by a voice behind me, just when we were on our way to the house; and, let me see—," stopping to consider, "it must have been Thursday, as I was driving from the station. Some one was hiding in the hedge, but after we passed he came out into the road—"

"But if he was behind you, how could you see him?" inquired Lady Clementina, who thought herself very sharp.

"Because I happened to look over my shoulder. He had long whiskers, and something in his figure or attitude made me think I had seen him before. Who could it have been?"

"The plot thickens. Some friend of yours, Miss St. Hellers, who has followed you here from Devonshire, and disguised himself as a farmer, considerably out at elbows."

"Now, don't laugh, Harold," said the Countess, fretfully. "The matter is a great deal too serious to be turned into a joke. This man may be a disreputable character, in the habit of hanging about the loc whenever a hard frost is likely to bring a number of people together. I often think our own friends are very careless in the way they throw down their fur cloaks on the bank; and Lady Fanny, the other day, actually forgot that her purse was in the pocket."

"Did she lose it?" said Harold, quickly; "then we might have a chance of running down the pickpocket, and catching our own man at the same time."

"No, she found it there, when she came back," and Lady Chester sighed, as she thought of her own loss.

"Have inquiries been made at the station?" asked Harold, after a pause. "They might have some recollection of this long-whiskered individual."

"Caitin was told to make the proper inquiries," said the Earl, looking up from the *St. James's Gazette*; "but I shall go there myself to-morrow, and question Ocle closely as to the exact number of tickets issued on that day."

"I suppose if any of our friends missed anything they would have been sure to let us know. It seems so strange that, as the star was taken, nothing else should go at the same time."

"I don't see that, Clem, for the fellow may have been interrupted. The housemaids are always coming and going all the morning with their dusters and brooms. I know if ever I chance to run up to my room to fetch anything, one of them is sure to scramble up from her knees on the hearthrug, and ask in a frightened whisper, 'if she's in the way!'"

"It was very unfortunate our all being out of the house," lamented the Countess. "I said that Ripley was too far for a drive in the winter, and I never wanted to go."

"Much good you would have done towards guarding your bedroom! Why, mamma, if twenty burglars had been in it, you would have known nothing about it as you sat in your boudoir."

"Perhaps not; but I feel as if it would not

have happened if I had been at home. We were never robbed before."

"And I hope we shan't be again. You see the house has been rather full lately, up till Wednesday or Thursday. I wonder if all the servants were honest," said Harold, thoughtfully.

"If they weren't we shall hear before long, because they are sure to steal something else," and Clementina, utterly tired of the subject, got up with a yawn, and walked towards the piano.

"I don't know if it is worth while to mention it," said Ruby, after a pause; "but when I was sitting by myself on Thursday evening I chanced to look down, and saw a box of cigars on the carpet."

"In the schoolroom!" exclaimed Lady Chester, in the greatest astonishment.

"Cigar-light, Miss St. Hellers! Are you sure it wasn't a harmless box of matches?" and Harold twirled the ends of his moustaches with an amused smile.

"If you doubt it, I will go and fetch them," and she rose at once.

"Do, my dear," said the Countess, approvingly, and Harold got up to open the door.

When she came back the box was submitted to the closest examination; but as it was only the most ordinary box in the world, it revealed nothing, except the one indisputable fact that a man—whether gentleman or burglar—had put his sacrilegious foot within the privileged sanctuary of the schoolroom.

"It looks rather bad for you, Miss St. Hellers, having a private assignation upstairs during my mother's absence," said Harold, mischievously.

"But Miss St. Hellers was absent herself, so no suspicion can rest on her," said Lady Chester, with an affable smile. "Do you really go off to Scotland to-morrow—I wish you wouldn't!"

"My dear mother, I am awfully sorry; but I can't help it. You see," he explained to Ruby, "a special friend of mine is coming of age, and I should never be forgiven if I didn't turn up."

"I don't like the accounts of Alverley at all," said Lady Chester, after a pause. "If it had not been for this wretched business I should have run up to town on purpose to see him. Imogen wrote me word yesterday that Mason told her himself that if the inflammation increased he would run the chance of losing his arm."

Ruby dropped her work and sat perfectly still, but her face grew white as her handkerchief.

"I think it would do both you and him an immense amount of good. Start with me to-morrow, and we could go as far as Ripley together."

"Impossible, my dear boy. Nothing would induce me to leave the house at present, and besides"—with a sigh—"have I ever had the smallest influence over Alverley, since the days that he wore an Eton jacket?"

"Who has? If anybody had," he said, speaking very slowly, and looking straight in front of him. "It would be a charity to exert it in favour of his health. He is told to keep to his sofa, and one day he goes to the theatre, because it is the first night of Miss Somebody or other's appearance in the rôle of Olivette, and another day he is seen at Paddington Station, strolling up and down the platform, as if on purpose to catch a chill—a railway platform being the draughtiest place in the world."

Ruby's head drooped low, till only the tip of her ear was visible, and that was as red as a rose.

"Who told you he was at the station?" and the Countess sighed again.

"Smithers, the guard. He asked me after Alverley's arm, and said he thought he must be better, because he was up and about. I wish my father!" with a glance at the Earl, who was nodding over his newspaper, "would try what he could do."

"Useless—perfectly useless. Alverley will go his own way, and I would defy anyone on earth to stop him. Let us go to bed; I feel as if there would never be any peace for me again."

"Don't say that, mother. I have no doubt the star will be found, but we must have a little patience," and, stooping his head, he kissed her cheek. "It is good-bye, as I shall start the first thing in the morning."

"Well, I wish you weren't going," looking fondly into his handsome face. "It always seems the greatest nonsense to me that you should go and work at that stupid Treasury, when you might live at home and look after your father's estates."

"Which do very much better without me. Good-night and good-bye, Miss St. Hellers. Don't admit male intruders into the schoolroom, or we may have you stolen next, when our backs are turned."

He looked down at her with such a curious expression in his eyes, that she blushed to the curls on her forehead.

"No," she said, very quietly, as she drew her hand away. "I am quite safe; for I am neither to be sold nor pawned."

(To be continued)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1851. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

## AN UNINVITED VISITOR.

—30—

THE Altendorf mansion was often thrown open for fêtes and parties, upon which occasion numerous invitations were issued, and the preparations were upon a scale rarely witnessed, but fully in keeping with its owner's colossal wealth and boundless munificence.

So it was natural that the marriage of his only daughter and heiress should be looked forward to with intense interest and expectation by those having an *entrée* to the house.

Rachel Altendorf was very beautiful. Her face, with its large, gazelle-like eyes, its straight, Grecian nose with its arching nostrils, its full yet delicate lips, was of that rare type which is seldom seen except in pictures by the old masters.

Our story opens with Rachel's marriage feast, at the time just previous to the ceremony.

The match (as is the custom on the continent) had been made by the parents of the contracting parties, and promised as fair for the young couple's happiness as do the generality of alliances. The groom came of a good old family, and would in time fall heir to a fine estate. His name was Raoul Garelton. He was tall and straight, with dark eyes (set almost too near to each other to have a pleasing effect) and closely cut black hair. His long heavy moustache drooped over his lips so as to almost totally conceal the expression of his mouth. But an occasional glimmer of even white teeth brightened up the lower part of his face, and counteracted the somewhat sullen expression habitual to it.

Rachel had seen but little of her fiancé; and it is not to be wondered at that her beautiful face expressed more sadness than joy; for her heart was filled with thoughts of the coming separation from those she loved.

But Raoul's dark features shone with mingled pride and exultation. The most admired girl in the country would soon be his wife, and also a "dower," which alone would have rendered her attractive in his eyes had she been as ugly as Hecate.

The bridal party had but just entered, and taken their respective positions before the expectant guests, when a disturbance arose outside, followed by the appearance of a woman in a state of great excitement. She had forced a passage through the group of servants, who had given way in terror, evidently thinking her crazed. She advanced, gesticulating wildly,—

"I forbid this marriage!" she exclaimed. "The bride is not what you think her. She is my child, and I will prove it!"

A sudden consternation fell upon all present, as each looked at the other, wondering what would be the finish of this strange scene. Mr. Altendorf was the first to recover his self-possession. He went to the woman, and said, sternly,—

"You have chosen a strange time and place for such a communication. It savours much of conspiracy."

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Altendorf. "It is a likely story indeed, that after all these years you think to make us believe that our Rachel is an imposter. Begone with your vile fabrication at once, or you shall be arrested!"

"Will the lady look me full in the face and see if she knows me!" was the dogged reply of the woman, who stood her ground sullenly, and as she spoke fixed her eyes with a malignant expression upon Mrs. Altendorf's agitated countenance.

The lady looked towards her in a disdainful complacency; but she turned pale and shrank back as though she had received a blow. She had recognised Karen, the nurse to whom the care of her infant had been confided at the time of her own almost fatal illness.

Karen's black eyes shone with an uncanny light from beneath the iron-grey hair which had escaped from her cap, and hung in elf-locks over her brown, wrinkled forehead.

"I see you know me," she said, harshly, "so I will go on with my story. Years ago I smothered your child in my sleep. It was an accident; but I was sorely frightened, and in my terror I substituted my own little Gretchen for your Rachel. For the girl's sake I have kept silence until now; but I am getting old, and I want my child."

Mr. Altendorf's ruddy face had grown very pale as he listened. There was an air of probability about the plain, unhesitating narration which cut him to the heart.

"Friends," he said, courteously, turning to his guests, "may I ask you to leave us alone with this strange, sudden trouble? Under the circumstances my daughter's marriage will unavoidably be postponed. You, Raoul," turning to the bridegroom, who had stood listening with a frown upon his dark face, "you may stay if you like, for you are as deeply interested as we ourselves are."

But Raoul uttered confusedly a few indistinct words of apology and went with the rest.

Karen looked after him with a scornful expression in her sharp black eyes, until he had disappeared. Then she turned towards Rachel.

"See," she said, "I have done you one good turn. I have saved you from a worthless bridegroom. What man, with a heart in his body, would have turned his back upon the girl he loved without so much as one word of sympathy for her trouble?"

Rachel had stood as though stunned, looking from one to the other of the group with wide, sad eyes, as though wondering, yet fearing to hear each new disclosure.

At Karen's words, Mr. Altendorf moved towards the stricken girl, and laid his hand tenderly upon her head.

"Hush woman!" he said, sternly. "Is the mischief you have done not sufficient that you must add to it?"

Then he softened his voice to a tone of persuasion.

"Come," he said, "tell us the whole truth without reserve, and if even you are Rachel's mother I will forgive you, and give you a large sum of money to go away and never come back to trouble us. No matter what happens, Rachel is my own dear daughter, and no tie of blood could strengthen my love for her. I will not give her up."

With a sudden cry, Rachel threw her arms about her father's neck, and a burst of tears came to her relief.

"Oh, my father!" she sobbed, "then I have not lost all! It seemed as though one fell blow had swept away parents, friends, and—"

"No, my own Rachel. Believe it not."

And the girl found herself clasped in motherly arms.

"Thinkest thou that love is a plant which can be withered by a bad woman's idle words?"

Mrs. Altendorf's look would have scorched old Karen, if the indignant fire in her eyes could have taken such a tangible effect.

A mixture of emotions was pictured upon

Karen's face as she listened. But all was merged into one of intense surprise as Rachel disengaged herself from the loving arms that encircled her, and moved hesitatingly towards the woman who had thus disturbed her peace.

Rachel's was one of those rare organizations to which duty is ever a paramount consideration. A martyr's spirit dwelt in that slender frame. She would have gone heroically to the stake rather than yield up one principle. So now she went to this poor creature, eliminated by her own confession.

"Why did you wait so long!" she said. "Do you not see what harm you have done! That poor, little dead child, who should have been in my place, is far, far better off than the living one, who has been made to act the part of an usurper! Oh! how could you do it!"

There was a pathos in Rachel's voice which might have touched a heart of stone. But, to all appearance, Karen was unmoved.

"It is not for a child to question a parent," she said, sharply. "You had better, instead, stir around and get your things on to accompany me home. It'll be very handy to have a daughter to take care of me, even if she has been brought up a bit delicate. She'll soon learn."

Rachel shivered. The woman's cold sarcastic words gave her a sensation akin to physical pain.

"Rachel is of age," said Mr. Altendorf. "You can have no influence over her excepting that which she is willing to give you. So you had better be cautious, and not be too hasty, or you will not gain much, even if your story proves true, which I doubt. No real mother could be so heartless. Go now, and collect your evidence. To-morrow, I will be in a more fit state to consider it."

As the woman turned to go, her poverty-stricken garb and her trembling steps caused a sudden pity to mingle with the shrinking horror with which Rachel regarded her.

"Stay," she said, laying one delicate hand upon Karen's arm. "Do you need money? If so, you shall have it."

In response to Rachel's pleading look, Mr. Altendorf drew out some coins and offered them to Karen; but she refused them.

"I am no beggar," she said. "I only want my rights, and to-morrow I will have them; and with a long, keen look at Rachel's face, the woman went her way. As she gained the outer air, her thin lips compressed themselves vindictively, and she murmured, "At last my revenge is near. The object of my life is well-nigh gained."

An affecting scene ensued between Rachel and her parents when they were alone again together. How to reconcile Rachel's tender conscience as to the course to adopt towards Karen, if that wretched woman proved to be her mother, was a puzzling question. But several days passed, and Karen did not come.

Rachel's health had succumbed to the pressure of anxiety and sorrow, and she was no longer cognizant of passing events, lying white and insensible from exhaustion between the attacks of wild delirium that characterised her feverish intervals.

Another disappointment had troubled Mr. Altendorf. Raoul Garcelon had not come near to offer his sympathy, and one morning a cold little note had been left at the door by his servant. It ran thus:—

"HONOURED FRIENDS,—

"I have failed to add to the sorrows of one who so nearly became my wife on the memorable evening which marked the downfall of my hopes of happiness, by raising anticipations which, of course, would be again destroyed if Miss Rachel is proven not to be your daughter. No Garcelon, of course, could wed with one from the lower, even (I must say sorrowfully) the criminal classes. So, so you see, I must remain in a painful position of uncertainty as to whether I am Miss Altendorf's future suitor, or simply her friend and well-wisher, as well as your devoted servant,

"RAOUL GARCELON."

Mr. Altendorf ran his eye over the note, and then gave it to his wife with a look of contempt.

"Read, Carmen," he said, "and see what a heartless rascal our Rachel came near calling her husband. Thank Heaven, he has shown himself now in his true colours. No matter what happens, he shall never again enter these doors."

Mrs. Altendorf's indignation showed itself in her sparkling eyes, as, after reading the epistle, she threw it upon the floor and placed her foot upon it.

"Who would have thought it, Josef! He seemed such a fine, pleasant young man! Isn't it strange that Rachel has not once mentioned his name? I hope her heart was not fully enlisted in his favour, for she has such strong feelings it would just put the finishing stroke to her troubles and kill her. I hope for the best, though, for she had seen him so few times; and she has always been so obedient to our wishes, I verily believe she would have accepted the husband we chose for her had he been old and ugly instead of young and handsome. Ah, Josef, if we had taken that fine, blue-eyed Carl von Salzu! But poor, mercenary creatures that we were, Raoul's money-bags tipped the scale in his favour."

"You say truly, wife. Carl would never have stolen away like a thief in the night, and left the girl of his choice in trouble. I would really feel comforted now to feel the clasp of the boy's hand. I always did like Carl; only he seemed too much of a boy for a husband to our queenly Rachel."

A quick step was even now heard sounding through the hall, and as if in answer to the wish, the door opened, and the servant showed in a fair-haired, blue-eyed youth, who barely waited to exchange greetings with his friends before he held out a paper and pointed to an article in the columns of personal events.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

And much to Mr. Altendorf's surprise he saw a notice that the engagement between Rachel Altendorf and Raoul Garcelon was off, owing to family reasons of a painful nature.

It was not long before Carl knew all. As he listened an intense interest was pictured in his speaking face.

"If Rachel is free!" he exclaimed, impetuously, "give her to me! I don't want a penny with her. I am doing well, and can take good care of her. I have always loved her, as you well know."

"Softly, boy," said Mr. Altendorf, smiling in spite of himself at Carl's earnestness. "Rachel is not without friends, as you seem to think."

Then, as Carl hung his head at the implied reproach, he took his hand in a hearty, sympathetic clasp.

"Do not misunderstand me. I saw what you meant, and I honour you for your truth and loyalty. But you must wait and see what time brings forth. Poor Rachel is very ill, and it is not at all probable that, with such an experience of a lover's selfishness, she will soon turn her thoughts upon another, be he an angel from Heaven."

"But," broke in Carl, impetuously, "will you be my friend with her and give me a chance to win her? I care not how long I have to wait."

"But you will have to be guarded in your manner. Do not let her imagine your object, or she would shut her heart from you at once. You must steal into her affections as it were unawares. I will stand your friend though; you may be sure I want no more Raoul Garcelons around, with their smooth ways and marble hearts."

Another week passed in the same suspense. Then a message was sent to Mr. Altendorf to come to a dying woman, and to bring with him a magistrate, as she wished so make a deposition.

It was Karen, and changed fearfully. She had been taken with a hemorrhage, and had been lying for some days at death's door. She had made use of her first strength to send for him, as the physician had told her it was but the rallying before the last struggle, and that she must attend quickly to what she had to do.



"I am a wicked sinner!" she said, fixing her feverishly bright eyes on Mr. Altendorf's face. "I hated Raoul Garcelon for his father's sake. He had the same smooth ways, and he made my life a curse from my youth up; so I revenged myself upon his son, where he would most feel it, by striking a blow at his intended wife. Heaven has stricken me for my sins, but a feeling of remorse had hold of me before the red-life blood started from my lungs. That angel-faced being who, amid the destruction of her own hopes, could spare a thought to the wretched old Karens' comfort, completed the first conquest over my intended sin. I cannot harm her to gratify my spite. Rachel is your own true daughter. I had my plans well laid to mislead you. I never had a child of my own, but I adopted one, and I caused all the papers to be made out that would be needed to prove her death, and that I had put Rachel in her place. Then I completed my wickedness by swearing to the truth of my statement. But upon my dying bed I swear now that it was not so, and I will give you a picture of my little Gretchen that you may see for yourself how impossible it would be for your child to have been mistaken for her. You can see that her eyes are like the sky in June, and her hair as yellow as the blessed sunshine."

She sank back exhausted. After a time she raised herself again, with a wild look of horror. "Do you think I can be forgiven? It is my only crime, and—I am—sorry."

A sudden red died the pale lips, and flowed down upon her breast in a tiny trickling stream. It was her life-current. The next moment her question was answered. She knew whether, like the thief upon the cross, her tardy repentance had saved her at the eleventh hour.

When Raoul Garcelon learned the truth he was wild with rage and mortification, but it was too late.

Rachel rose from her long and trying illness renewed in health and strength. It is true that the lines of the beautiful face had become sharper and more clearly outlined, and that the roses upon her cheeks were a shade fainter than of old, but it gave an added charm to her loveliness.

The closing scene of our story is at the expiration of three years from its commencement. Again it is at a wedding festival. But the bride's eyes no longer turn constantly and timidly away from her lover's face. They now and then steal a look at the beaming, happy countenance of her faithful Carl; and if by chance they intercept one of his radiant, loving, tender glances, a soft blush warms the delicate oval face, and steals up even to the soft, curling rings of jet-black hair which have replaced the massive braids of old, which had to be cut off during the fearful struggle when life and death fought for the mastery over her slender frame.

Happy bride and groom! for Love has lighted the torch at their marriage feast.

A most acceptable Christmas present, either to give or receive, would be one of Campbell's melodeons. This old-established firm have been selling their splendid instruments for the past fifty years, but the demand for them is greater than ever. Messrs. Campbell and Co., 116, Tron-gate, Glasgow, will send their new illustrated privilege price list, containing full particulars, to any reader enclosing penny stamp for postage.

Those who have only seen the holly in hedges, shrubberies, or as an undergrowth among larger trees, will be surprised to learn that if its head is not cut down with the merciless hatchet, it will grow to a height of from forty to sixty feet, with a stem varying from two to four feet in diameter. There are numerous examples, both in England and Scotland, of holly trees that have reached these dimensions. It is very hardy, and flourishes on the bleak heights of Dartmoor.

**CHRONIC INDIGESTION** and its attendant misery and suffering cured with Tonic "Dorona" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemist, 84, post free from Dr. House, "Glendower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, 6s., 6 Stamps

## HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

—307—

### CHAPTER L.

Rupert Dane never forgot the sensation that swept across his heart as he walked slowly up the paved walk that led to John Barton's cottage, where Gladys was stopping.

How well he remembered the object that had brought him there that other time in the days gone by! He remembered how he had built his hopes on seeing Gladys that cold winter night, to beg of her to go over to The Mount and plead with Gwen to elude her stern papa's vigilance, and elope with him.

Gladys had saved him from the wrath of the late old lawyer, who had followed them, and meant to challenge him to mortal combat.

In that moment Rupert almost wished that the duel had taken place.

The miller's wife looked greatly astounded when she answered the knock at the door, and saw who her visitor was.

"Is Gladys here?" he asked, huskily.

"Yes," she said, rather hesitatingly.

"Can I see her?" he asked, earnestly.

"I hardly think she will have time to see you, sir," she answered, dubiously. "Gladys is leaving the village for good to-day. She never wants to see it again; and I do not blame the girl—she has suffered so much and so unjustly here. She goes by the 10.20 train; it doesn't want very much to that time now. So, you see, if she did see you, she would have but a very few moments to spare."

"Will you tell her my business is very urgent?" he requested, eagerly. "Say that I must see her, if but for a moment."

She courtseyed and quitted the apartment. Soon after he heard the soft rustle of a woman's skirts, the door opened hesitatingly, and Gladys, in a plain grey travelling-dress, stood pale as a lily before him.

"Gladys!" he said, huskily, stepping forward.

"You—you wished to see me, Mr. Dane?" she said, drawing back a little, her eyes drooping in embarrassment.

He looked at her, the timid girl who had been his bride for a few short hours—his bride in name only—and his extended hand fell heavily to his side.

"You have heard of my intended departure, and are here to bid me good-bye!" she said, timidly, as he did not speak.

"No," he answered, slowly. "I did not know of it, Gladys. I came here for quite another purpose. I am glad I am here in time to prevent your intended departure," he added.

She looked up at him quite startled, and her sweet lips grew white.

"Is it some new trouble I am called upon to face?" she asked, tremulously. "I—I have become so used to expecting it that—"

"No, no," he cut in, quickly; "pardon me for keeping you a single instant in suspense. I—I am here to beg a great favour at your hands—a favour for one now helpless and beyond all human aid—who needs you."

"Is it about Gwen? Is—Is she dead?" she asked, in an awe-struck voice.

"Yes, it is about Gwen," he replied sadly. "She is not dead. But I—I will break into the subject without preamble, Gladys. We want you to come to her; you can save her life perhaps. She calls for you night and day. No one can comfort her. Let me make it a prayer to you. You are noble and charitable of heart; forget all the wrong she has done you, and remember only that she is afflicted so cruelly. The heart of her cruellest enemy would feel a pang of pity as they gaze upon the wreck of what was once the bonny Gwen. Come to her, Gladys; she calls for you, refusing to be comforted until you are with her. You have a mission to perform—duty points out a path to you. Oh, Gladys, can you refuse to follow it?"

Gladys listened with pale cheeks and dilated eyes.

"Go—to—Gwen!" she gasped, recoiling and looking at him. "Oh, I cannot—I cannot!"

Ask anything else of me. I could not go into her presence. I—I would drop down on the threshold!"

"You have been brave in the past, Gladys," he pleaded, hoarsely, "and now I pray you to bring all your courage to bear upon this earnest prayer. Where were you intending to go to-day, if I may ask the question?"

"I have no hesitation in replying," she answered, in a low voice. "I have bought my ticket for London."

"Was it your idea to obtain employment there?" he asked, huskily.

"Yes," she answered, timidly. "I—I thought I might get a position in so large a town—to teach little children or—or be a companion to some lady."

"Stay and be a companion—a friend to Gwen," he exclaimed, earnestly. "You shall have twice the remuneration that you would receive in London. Ay, I will triple it—quadruple it—you can name your own price!"

She turned deathly pale, and she looked at him with a gaze he never forgot; it haunted him all the rest of his life.

"I beg of you to say no more," she faltered; adding: "I could never take one penny from the man whom I have called—husband! It would burn my hands! If I consent to go to—Gwen—it will be on an errand of mercy, and not for remuneration."

"Forgive me, Gladys," he said, humbly; "I did not mean to wound you. Come, then, as poor Gwen's friend. She has no mother's gentle hands to minister to her wants; she has no sister. Come and be her guardian angel. I wish I could kneel here at your feet and breathe a prayer that might touch your heart if my earnest pleading falls. What words can I say to influence you?"

"Will you give me time to think it over?" she asked, slowly.

"I must, if you ask it," he replied; "but each moment you keep me in doubt is hard for me to bear."

Gladys walked over to the window, and looked thoughtfully out over the little patch of garden—looked without seeing the bright-hued flowers, for her eyes were full of tears.

It was a bitter struggle to poor Gladys.

Should she go to the woman who had wrecked her life—the woman who had taken from her all that was worth living for?

She looked up at the blue, cloudless sky and prayed that Heaven would guide her in her decision. Ah, it was so hard to judge what she should do!

Perhaps the thought of living beneath the same roof with Rupert and of realizing that he belonged to another, brought the pangs that shot through her heart.

The battle was over at last—duty had conquered pride and regret.

"I—I will go to Gwen," she said, very gravely. The light that broke over his face was pitiful to see. It startled even Gladys.

"You are noble and kind," he said. "May Heaven give you that which your heart craves most in this world for your goodness," he added fervently.

He wondered why she turned so pale and leaned so heavily against the nearest chair for support.

"Do you wish me to accompany you now?" she asked, abruptly.

"If you will be so kind, Gladys," he returned, wistfully.

Neither John Barton, the miller, nor his good wife, Maria, took kindly to the idea.

"I should advise you to keep away from that mad creature who has done you so much harm already," Gladys declared the miller's wife; adding, "I am afraid she will be the death of you yet."

"I think it is my duty to go to her," responded Gladys.

"One must never place themselves in absolute danger, even for duty's sake," declared Maria Barton. "Do you suppose if there was a woman on the face of this earth that had at any time attempted my life that I would place myself in her power again? I should say not. But you

have a different way of looking at it, and I suppose if you have made up your mind to go, nothing I could say in this world would influence you, would it?"

"I am afraid not, aunt," confessed the girl. "Then I might just as well say follow the bent of your own will, Gladys. But I might as well tell you my opinion of such an arrangement, and that is, that no good will come of it; mark well my words!"

That warning fell clear and distinctly on Gladys's ears, and she felt almost like changing her resolution.

She might have done so had it not been that she had but told Rupert a moment before that she would go to Gwen.

Her aunt watched Gladys and Rupert walk down the path together with a strange expression on her comely face.

"Heaven grant that it may all come out right," she muttered; "but I have a strange premonition that something evil will happen. Oh, would that I could have persuaded my poor little Gladys not to place herself in that woman's power again."

## CHAPTER LL

WHEN Gladys saw the great change in poor Gwen, she bowed her head and wept as few women weep in a lifetime.

The pathetic expression of the sad, dark eyes touched her heart to the very core.

Gwen did not recognize her, but still pleaded pitifully for Gladys to come to her, and yet the presence of faithful, patient Gladys seemed to cast a soothing spell over her. She would permit no other hand to lie on her burning brow, no other hand but Gladys's to hold a cooling draught to her lips.

Rupert's mother was always present when he entered a room where Gladys was, but when she observed how careful he was to never enter the girl's presence when she was alone, she told herself that her vigilance was not necessary.

Gwen grew weaker and weaker despite all their tender watchful care, and the day came when Rupert had to carry her to the window in his strong arms to see the sun shining on the crimson rose she loved so well.

"I shall never see the rose or the sunlight again," she whispered. "Never again!"

No one paid any attention to these little vagaries of speech. She would be stronger soon, they thought, but she grew so alarmingly worse that the doctors were quickly summoned to hold a consultation.

Among them was one whose face seemed strangely familiar to Rupert, and this thought grew more upon him as he watched him bending intently over Gwen.

He called the attention of both Mr. Melville and Gladys to this fact, but both declared that it must be his imagination, for the doctor in question—a stern, grave-looking man, with a heavy beard and troubled eyes—was a stranger in the vicinity.

And once, when Rupert entered quite unexpectedly, he found the doctor pacing up and down in great mental excitement.

"Mr. Dane," he said, "the time has come when I can remain silent no longer. Poor Gwen is fading away before my eyes like a flower withering in the bud, and no human being save myself has power to arrest the dread disease."

Who was this man who took Gwen's name so familiarly on his lips, and dared make such a wonderful statement? Rupert was dumfounded.

"First of all, before I reveal who and what I am, I must bind you to an oath of silence never to reveal, by word or deed, my identity."

Rupert was greatly amazed by this procedure; still, he gave the required promise.

Then, quick as a flash, the man flung a wig from his head, and threw off a long curling beard which he wore, and stood revealed to Rupert—Cecil St. John, Gwen's old lover!

"Hush!" cried St. John. "Remember your promise. Make no outcry. You will not betray

me when you have learned my errand here. I will explain as briefly as possible.

"You know how I parted from Gwen—how she detected what I was, and scorned me on the day she was to have been my bride. I vowed then a terrible revenge upon her, and, Heaven pardon me, I kept my cruel vow.

"I returned again soon after I had fled from it, but in so perfect a disguise no human being ever recognized me.

"I opened an apothecary shop and laboratory—Ah! now you remember the old German professor! I must be brief, to tell you all that I would say, for moments are as precious as gold to Gwen.

"Among my customers was Marie, Gwen's maid, and through her I saw a clear road to my revenge. She purchased from me a sleeping-potion—a deadly drug—ten drops of which produce sleep; twenty, insanity, and thirty, death.

"Gwen is at the present moment insane from the effects of that powerful drug. I alone can administer to her the antidote."

"Why has it not been administered to her, then?" cried Rupert, excitedly.

"Hush! be not so hasty," responded St. John. "The antidote is more powerful than the drug itself. It will either cure in a moment's time, or kill. I give you fair warning; I dare make no false promises. Now you know all.

Dare you take the risk of its being given her—to cure or to kill her? Her life or her death, as well as her reason in the balance, hangs in your hands. Think quickly what you desire done."

"I will talk the matter over with Gwen's father," said Rupert, turning toward the door; but St. John was there before him.

"You, and you alone, are to decide her fate," he retorted, firmly, placing his back to the door. "Make an outcry, and you are a dead man!"

As he spoke, he placed a small, silver-mounted revolver on a table beside him.

"Betray my identity, and your life will pay the forfeit of your indiscretion," he said, replacing the wig and beard. "Think deeply and quickly—are you willing to take the terrible risk? If she lives, her reason will be restored; if the drug means death for her it will perform its work instantly, leaving no trace behind it."

How long Rupert paced that floor, a prey to his own thoughts, he never knew. At length he turned, and faced St. John.

"Let the antidote be administered to my wife," he said, huskily; "and if she recovers her reason, you shall have half my fortune. If she dies, I shall shoot myself over her grave for being the cause of it, and the same sod will cover both!"

"There is one thing more that I want to say to you to complete my confession," said St. John, "and that is, I heard all the story in the court about poor Gwen's attempt to throw Gladys into the Black Pool, and also how she set fire to The Mount, after luring Gladys to the tower, and this I would say in regard to it, at such times Gwen must invariably have taken the drug to produce sleep, and was under its influence. She was not accountable for her actions. Under this circumstance, which I swear to you is true, you should find pardon for the poor girl in your heart."

"I do," responded Rupert, sobbing as strong men seldom sob in a lifetime.

The next half-hour was one of the most intense anxiety to Rupert, for he had at last persuaded himself to permit the experiment of saving Gwen and her reason. Together they approached the couch, then suddenly a great hushed cry broke from St. John's lips.

"It was not intended that she should be saved," he muttered. "See, she is beyond all mortal aid. Gwen's dead!"

Yes, dead in all her youth and beauty—poor Gwen! who had known only the bitterest drege in love's cup.

Yielding to Rupert's protestation and solemn pledge that he would befriend him if ill came to him, St. John made a full public confession, and those who knew of Gwen's crimes now pitied her; and to this day the village folk take strangers to the spot where she lies sleeping under a bower of crimson-hearted roses, and

# EPPE'S COCOA

GRATEFUL

COMFORTING

Distinguished everywhere for Delicacy of Flavour, Superior Quality, and Nutritive Properties. Specially grateful and comforting to the nervous and dyspeptic. Sold in 2-lb. and 3-lb. packets, and 1-lb. tins, labelled JAMES EPPE & CO., Ltd., Homoeopathic Chemists, London.

BREAKFAST

SUPPER

# EPPE'S COCOA

## OTTEY'S STRONG FEMALE PILLS.

Quickly and certainly remove all obstructions, arising from any cause whatever, where Steel and Pennyroyal fails. Invaluable to women. By post, under cover, for 14 and 25 stamps from THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, 21, Hagley Road, Birmingham. Please mention LONDON READER.

£20

TOBACCONISTS COMMENCING.

See Ill. Guide (250 pages), 3d. How to open a Cigar Store, 250 to 25,000. TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 126, Basing Road, London. The largest and original house (50 years' experience). Manager, H. MYERS.

# TOOTH-ACHE

CURED INSTANTLY BY

**BUNTER'S**  
Nerve Pain Expeller  
Nerve Pain Expeller  
Nerve Pain Expeller

Prevents Decay, Saves  
Extraction, Sleepless Nights  
Prevented.

<p><b>SIXTY YEARS' SUCCESS.</b></p> <p><b>WHELPTON'S PURIFYING PILLS</b></p> <p>Estab. 1835.</p> <p>G. Whelpton &amp; Son, 2, Crane Ct., Fleet St., London. (7797)</p>	<p>For Indigestion, Headache, Biliousness, Constipation, Sea Sickness.</p>
	<p>INVALUABLE FOR LADIES.</p>

# TO THE DEAF.

A Gentleman who has cured numerous cases of Deafness and Noise in the Head after many years suffering, will gladly send full particulars of the remedy, on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.

L. CLIFTON,

Amberley House, Norfolk Street, Strand, London.

AN HONEST MEDICINE.  
**DR. DAVIS'S FAMOUS FEMALE PILLS.**  
THE MOST EFFECTUAL ON EARTH.

NO IRREGULARITY CAN RESIST THEM  
Old, 1s. 1d., 2s. 6d., 4s. 6d.; extra strong, 11s. Sent free from observation by

Dr. Davis, 309, Portobello Road, London, W.

or order of any chemist.  
Dr. Davis's little book for MARRIED WOMEN most invaluable, sent free on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

# KEATING'S LOZENGES

THERE IS NO BETTER REMEDY IN THE WHOLE WORLD FOR ALL COUGH AND THROAT TROUBLES THAN KEATING'S LOZENGES. ONE GIVES RELIEF. THEY WILL CURE, AND THEY WILL NOT INJURE YOUR HEALTH. THEY CONTAIN ONLY THE PUREST DRUGS.

Sold everywhere in 1/11 Tins.



tell the story of her sad young life and its fatal ending.

On the evening of the day that Gwen was laid to rest, Rupert Dane left the village; but before he went away he exacted a promise from Gladys that she would remain with his feeble old mother, and yielding at last to the entreaties of both mother and son, Gladys remained with Mrs. Dane.

For quite a year Rupert wrote to his mother regularly, always ending by saying a few pleasant words for Gladys, and one day a letter came from Rupert that was all Gladys own.

"Gladys, darling," it ended, in the postscript, "I cannot endure any longer the suspense that is eating my heart out. I hear such glowing accounts of your goodness and beauty in every letter from mother, and how many lovers are fluttering about you, that I am afraid if I do not speak at once I will surely lose you. I shall never come back unless you bid me come, and meet me with a betrothal-ring on your finger—my promised bride."

Oh, how happy Gladys was over that letter! How she laughed and cried over it, showering kisses and tender caresses over it, as young girls so often do over the written words of the men they love!

Gladys's letter must have contained the sweet assurance, for on the very next week Rupert returned, unburned, but handsomer than ever. Gladys fled at the sound of his well-known footsteps, but he knew well where to find her, and he followed her to the rose garden.

He came up to the little slender figure standing by the fountain and clasped her closely in his strong arms.

"Do not struggle to get away from me, my bonnie Gladys, my darling and only love, for these arms intend to hold you just this way through life! Look up in my face, sweetheart, and tell me you do love me. I have hungered for those words so long!"

Very timidly she raised her flower-like face, all blushes and happy tears, to glance shyly at him, and he read the answer in her eyes that her lips refused to speak.

The next day there was a happy wedding, and everyone declared that there never was a more beautiful bride or a happier husband, and everyone was pleased that their romance had ended in a happy marriage, as every romance should. And Gladys is thankful for the fact that Rupert is her very own now, and not a lover lent to her.

[THE END.]

MANY queer superstitions with regard to holly exist. Thus, it is said that a bough of holly planted near a dwelling-house keeps off lightning, or cast into water makes it become ice.

IVY, though less in vogue as a Christmas evergreen than holly, is yet much used in church decoration. Its dark berries contrast well with the red glowing ones of the holly. It is also ready at hand in most country churches, on whose walls it is very commonly grown. When allowed to grow up the walls of buildings, it protects them from damp by throwing off the falling rain, and also by sucking out by the rootlets the moisture from the walls. These rootlets are thrown out by the plant in great abundance along its whole length.

DR. TIBBLE'S VI-COCOA is now well-known throughout the United Kingdom and is in daily use in thousands of homes. Still there may be some of our readers who have not yet made its acquaintance, and to those we would say "do so at once." There is no need to purchase a packet of the cocoas in order to decide as to its merits, as a post-card addressed to Dr. Tibble's Vi-Cocoa Co., 60 and 62, Bunhill-row, London, E.C., and mentioning this paper, will bring by return of post a dainty sample tin containing sufficient cocoa to make a large breakfast-cup full. It is a cocoa that is bound to please the most fastidious palate, and we are confident, that on once giving it a trial, it will continue in daily demand, especially at this season of the year.

## FACETIE.

JABBERS: "I woke up last night and found a burglar in my room." Havers: "Catch him!" Jabbers: "Certainly not. I'm not making a collection of burglars."

MISS ELDER: "I will bet you anything you like that I never marry." Mr. Easy: "I'll take you." Miss Elder (rapturously): "Will you really? Then I need not bet at all."

MR. DUMPSY (who catches Johnny amongst his mother's fresh starts): "Look here, Johnny, what are you up to?" Johnny (indistinctly): "Up to the ninth, pa; but they're awfully small."

CHOLLY: "Yass, I twiled to play golf last summer, but I gave it up when I was hit on the head and knocked silly." Mand: "Indeed, that's too bad, and can the doctors do nothing for you?"

"I THOUGHT your doctor told you that you'd have to get out of this climate." "He did, but I couldn't arrange my business affairs so as to be able to get away, so I had to change my doctor."

"Do you think you are expert enough to take dictation for that author?" asked one typewriter of another. "I guess so. If I find I am falling behind, I'll tell him it was because I got interested in his story."

MRS. BONGTONG (proud mother of the accomplished girl graduate): "I hope, Alice, that you addressed that French count in his native tongue. What did he say in reply?" Alice: "He apologized and said he was sorry, but he understood nothing but French."

MRS. FLATLEIGH (examining their new piano, regretfully): "Oh Reginald, the agent didn't give us any piano stool!" Mr. Flatleigh (philosophically): "Never mind, dear. You can sit on the sofa on the opposite side of the room and play nicely."

A LITTLE boy seven years old, whose father is a great dog-fancier, was taken to see his little twin brothers, aged three days. "Well, Tommy, how do you like your brothers?" asked his father. "Oh, they are both very funny," said Tommy; "but which are you going to drown?"

LITTLE Jack and Daisy are finishing a plate of strawberries. There are only two left now—one of them fine and luscious, the other small and unripe. Daisy: "Is 'oo gweedy?" Jack: "No, I've not gweedy." Daisy: "Then 'oo choose?"

SENIOR PARTNER: "Keep a sharp eye on Holdfast. I'm afraid he's robbing the firm." Junior Partner: "Eh! Is he living extravagantly?" Senior Partner: "Well I passed him on the street yesterday, and he was smoking a cigar that didn't smell bad at all."

"I LIKE this pattern well enough," said the customer who had dropped in to look at some gingham, "but I am afraid the colours will run." "Run, ma'am!" indignantly answered the salesman. "Red, white, and blue! They never run!" Whereupon the woman with the flag pinned to the lapel of her jacket rose patriotically to the occasion and bought forty-five yards.

AN Irishman once said to another who had taken the pledge and received a medal from the priest, "And so you have signed the teetotal pledge have you?" "Yes; and I am not ashamed of it, either." "And did not Paul tell Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake?" "So he did," said the teetotaler; "but my name is not Timothy, and there is nothing the matter with my stomach."

A SAILOR from Greenock and an Irishman from Belfast recently had a quarrel. They agreed upon a hand-to-hand encounter, to be fought to the finish. Whichever wished to "cave in" was to shout out "Sufficient!" After an hour and a half of determined pugilistic work, the Irishman at last roared out "Sufficient!" "Ma, conscience!" said the Scotchman, "If I haven't been thinkin' o' that word for the last cor, but couldn't ken it for the life o' me!"

A YOUNG MAN, becoming engaged recently, was desirous of presenting his intended with a ring, appropriately inscribed; but being at a loss what to have engraved on it, called upon his father for advice. "Well," said the old man, "put on, 'When this you see, remember me!'" The young lady was much surprised, a few days after, at receiving a beautiful ring, with this inscription: "When this you see, remember father."

A DOCTOR who was out late one night was approached by a footpad. "Gimme your money," said the marauder. "The doctor turned round towards the man, and, in an offended tone, exclaimed: "What are you doing over here? Get on the other side of the street; I'm working this side myself." The tramp begged the doctor's pardon for the breach of etiquette, and vanished.

AT Norwich a poor woman took her little one in her arms to hear a political speaker. The loud voice from the platform awoke the child and made it cry. Its mother got up and was leaving, when the speaker stopped her by saying: "My good woman, don't you go away; the baby doesn't disturb me." "It isn't for that, sir, I leave," she replied; "it's you disturbs the baby!"

He (desperately): "Tell me the truth. Is it not my poverty that stands between us?" She (singly): "X-e-s." He (with a ray of hope): "I admit that I am poor, and so, unfortunately, is my father; but I have an aged uncle who is very rich, and a bachelor. He is an invalid and cannot long survive." She: "How kind and thoughtful you are! Will you introduce me to him?"

"ARE you the society editor?" asked the large woman. "No, madam," said the one addressed; "I am only the court reporter." "Really! I am surprised! But perhaps you will do. Your paper said in its account of the affair at my house that floral decorations 'lent beauty to the scene.' I wish you would have your paper state that the floral beauty was not lent. Everything was paid for."

"THE woman next door," said the fat man, "owing to some sort of misad connections, had to fall to and do the washing herself last week. And what do you suppose my wife did?" "Went over and wore herself out helping her!" asked the lean man. "Not she. She sent out a hurry call to a bunch of her cronies, and they had a perfectly lovely game of lawn tennis while the poor unfortunate in the next yard was hanging out clothes."

"SURELY," said the artful shop-assistant, as he looked at the sample which the lady showed him, "you don't intend to have a dress made for yourself from such goods as this?" "Why not?" she answered rather testily. "It's much too old for you," he replied. They had no more of it left, but it was not necessary for him to tell her that; so she took the piece which he recommended, although it cost ninepence-three-farthings more.

A GOOD story is told of a certain bishop. He recently addressed a large assembly of Sunday-school children, and wound up by asking, in a very paternal and condescending way: "And now, is there a-a-n-y little boy, or a-a-n-y little girl, who would like to ask me a question?" A little shrill voice called out: "Please, sir, why did the angels walk up and down Jacob's ladder when they had wings?" "Oh! ah, yes, I see!" said the bishop; "and now, is there a-a-n-y little boy, or a-a-n-y little girl, who would like to answer little Mary's question?"

AN Irishman, blessed with only a single copper, went into a dram shop in Belfast, wondering how he could best get a dram of whiskey for his penny. A squrean came in shortly after and called for threepennyworth of "the cratur." Before he could lift it from the counter Pat advanced to him crying,—"Yer hanner, I'll lay ye a copper I'll drink that stuff without lettin' it go down my throat." The squrean at once accepted the challenge, and each laid a penny on the counter. Pat at once swallowed the whiskey, with a hungry gulp, and leaving his penny on the counter walked off saying,—"I've lost, and there's my penny."

## SOCIETY.

THE Queen has sixty housemaids at Windsor Castle.

THE Queen preserves her bridal clothes with the greatest care.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA has postponed her departure for China until the end of this month, when she will embark at Genoa for Hong Kong.

THERE will be two Levees at St. James's Palace next season during February and March, both of which are to be held for the Queen, by the Duke of York.

THE Queen is to reside at Windsor until either Friday, December 18th, or Tuesday, the 20th, when the Court will remove to Osborne until the middle of February.

THE Queen signs on an average three photographs a day, and often a much larger number, for presentation to her friends at home and abroad.

WHEN the Queen is robed for a State occasion, such as a "Drawing-Room," it is no uncommon thing to see her display £150,000 worth of jewellery. At other times she wears scarcely any.

EVERY night, in every ship in her Majesty's Navy the Queen's health is drunk by the officers of the vessel; but it is a curious fact that it is always drunk sitting, the officers never rising as is usual on land.

It is practically arranged that the March Drawing-Rooms shall be held by Princess Christian on behalf of the Queen, but that there is reason to hope that the Princess of Wales will emerge from her seclusion for the after Easter functions; while the Queen may be expected at one, if not more, of these later Drawing-Rooms. It is not anticipated, either, that the Princess of Wales will hold herself entirely aloof from public functions in connection with works of benevolence; but, of course, it is inevitable that the loss her Royal Highness has sustained should make a certain amount of difference in regard to her general engagements in society.

THE Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who are once more at Coburg, will celebrate their silver wedding on January 23rd next. The festival will be kept at Gotha, and all their children and their four grandchildren are expected there. The Duke of Coburg is now in much better health than he was, but he has not yet entirely lost the eczema from which he has suffered so long. Prince Alfred of Coburg is at present staying with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse, at the Jagdschloss, Wolfgarten, near Darmstadt.

THE modern girl of fashion has a new delight. She is now collecting bows—bows of satin, velvet, chenille, or chiffon. With every one of her new gowns three or four new bows are ordered. It is with the evening gowns that the bows are more fetching. Many are of satin, hand embroidered, and made to represent a butterfly. Others are just a soft little choux of chiffon to be tucked coquettishly close to a knot of hair. Ornaments for the hair are all the vogue this season, but they have the redeeming quality of being light and airy. Heavy jet and gold and silver ornaments are not nearly so fashionable as those made of some filmy fabric-like gauze. Feathers and pompons are also the rage. Some of the newest and most effective are white pompons which look not unlike fluffy snowballs; but the hair ornaments are glistening with bits of silver or specks of gold. Feathers for the hair are more in fashion than they have been for several years past. Two small curly tips are worn, and the newest are shaded to blend with the gown. It is also fashionable to wear turtles or lizards in the hair. The turtle ornaments are many of them most costly. They come elaborately studded with jewels.

## STATISTICS.

IN the production of the human voice forty-four muscles are exercised.

A FIBRE of silk one mile long weighs but twelve grains.

THE German army numbers 585,000 in times of peace. War would bring it to 2,230,000, and the reserves added make the number of men 4,300,000.

IF all the lands suitable for cultivation of sugar-cane were utilised in Cuba, the island could produce enough sugar for the entire Western Hemisphere.

ONE FOURTH of the people of the earth die before the age of six, one-half before the age of sixteen, and only person in each hundred born lives to the age of sixty-five.

RUSSIA possesses the largest standing army on earth. Every year some 280,000 conscripts join the Russian forces, which, in time of peace number 100,000 men. On a war-footing this rises to 2,500,000, and calling out the reserves would increase it to 6,947,000 well-trained soldiers. Should necessity arise, the militia would be called out, bringing the Czar's forces up to 9,000,000 men.

## GEMS.

A MAN'S MANNERS are the mirror in which he shows his portrait.

IF cheerfulness knocks for admission, we should open our hearts wide to receive it, or it never comes inopportunely.

TEMPERANCE and labour are the two best physicians of men; labour sharpens the appetite, and temperance prevents him from indulging in excess.

LEARNING is either good or bad according to him that has it—an excellent weapon, if well used; otherwise, like a sharp razor in the hands of a child.

THOSE who despise fame seldom deserve it. We are apt to undervalue the purchase we cannot reach, to conceal our poverty the better. It is a spark which kindles upon the best fuel, and burns brightest in the bravest breast.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

IRISH MOSS.—One ounce Irish moss, one pint milk, sugar; pick the moss and take out black and very heavy pieces, wash it, and soak it for a few hours in a teacup of water; put on the milk to boil, add the moss, and boil for 15 or 20 minutes, stirring all the time; strain through a piece of muslin, and sweeten to taste and flavour if liked; when cold it turns out a firm shape.

CHOCOLATE CREAM.—Work one ounce and a half of potato flour into a paste with cold milk, add two ounces of grated chocolate and mix with one pint of boiling milk. Stir over the fire till the whole thickens, then add castor sugar to taste and a few drops of vanilla. Turn the whole into a bowl and beat in gradually half a pint of stiffly-whipped cream. When all is mixed thoroughly, pour into a wetted mould. Turn out to serve.

CURRY OF LAMB AND TOAST.—One pint of stock, two tablespoonfuls of butter, two tablespoonfuls of flour, two tablespoonfuls of finely chopped onion, one teaspoonful of curry powder, one and one-half pounds of cold cooked lamb cut into strips. Melt the butter in a saucepan, add onion, and cook slowly until a golden brown, then add curry powder, flour, salt, and pepper to taste. When blended add the stock a little at a time, stirring until it thickens; then add the lamb and simmer until tender. Serve on buttered toast.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE German Christmas Eve is the most festive day of the year for children.

THE Tartarian alphabet contains 202 letters being the longest in the world.

THE battering-ram, the ancient substitute for artillery, was invented about 450 B.C.

THERE is a well in West Virginia which discharges natural gas with a roar that can be heard six miles away.

THE lightest tubing ever made is of nickel aluminium. Three thousand feet of this tubing weighs only one pound avoirdupois.

THE earliest authenticated sea-fight is said to have been that between the Corinthians and the Ceryreans, in which the former conquered—664 B.C.

It has been found in Switzerland that in building a railway, labourers could work only one-third as long at a height of 10,000 feet as a mile lower.

It is believed by oil experts that West Virginia is underlaid by a sea of petroleum. The output of white sand oil for 1897 amounted to over 18,000,000 barrels.

A NEW use has been found for fast torpedo-boat destroyers. The 30 knot boat *McKard* was under orders recently to keep cruising in the North Sea for the purpose of training pigeons for the Naval service.

ONE custom that continues with us is that of hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve. Little children are taught that St. Nicholas brings in gifts to them through closed windows, and it is supposed this custom started from a tradition that St. Nicholas used to throw purses of money in through the windows of poor maidens, so that they might have marriage portions.

SEALING WAX, which has been abandoned for so many years, and been little used in society, has suddenly become fashionable again. A meaning is now attached to each colour. White sealing-wax means a proposal of marriage; black, of course, mourning; violet, condolence; brown, or old gold, an invitation to dinner; ruby is used by lovers; crimson is reserved strictly for business; green means hope; pale grey, friendship; pink, love letters; yellow, jealousy; gold and silver, constancy.

A CUSTOM at one time prevalent in England and still observed in some of the northern districts, is that of placing an immense log of wood—sometimes the root of a great tree—in the wide chimney-place. This log is often called the Yule-log, and it was on Christmas Eve that it was put on the wide hearth. Around it would gather the entire family, and its entrance was the occasion of a great deal of ceremony. There was music and rejoicing while the one authorised to light it was obliged to have clean hands. It was always lighted with a brand left over from the log of the previous year, which had been carefully preserved for the purpose.

THERE is not enough holly growing wild in Britain to supply all needs at Yuletide, and in the North hundreds of acres of the plant are grown for market. These holly-farms are taken considerable care of, and bring in goodly rewards to their owners at this time of year. Holly will grow where nothing else would have any chance at all, and much land that would otherwise lie derelict is devoted to the holly cultivation. The grower gets his one pound a load for the prickly luxury about Christmas time, and, as the growing costs him next to nothing, he is satisfied. In the southern counties, especially in Devonshire, where holly grows wild in profusion, another plan is adopted. Farmers are glad enough to get the cumbersome bushes cleared off their land. Holly abounds in the West, and tillers of the soil give free leave to workmen at this time of year to free down the bushes and take them away. These the cutters sell in the towns, and a good thing they make of it. They look upon the holly as as much their own by right as the harvest free beer of August. But holly is the more profitable of the two.



## CHRISTMAS CARDS AND NOVELTIES.

Messrs. RAHAEL TUCK AND SONS (LIMITED) seem to have again carried all records before them with their marvellous and extensive assortment of Christmas and New Year's cards, books, calendars, and other artistic and literary novelties for the festive season. To excel their former achievements might surely be deemed an impossible task; but those who, like ourselves, have had an opportunity of examining their productions for the present season must admit they have fully accomplished it.

Their new assortment of Christmas cards



alone comprises no fewer than 1,400 sets of totally new designs, all rendered in most beautiful style and taste, and with the most exquisite finish. A charming innovation, which most certainly has come to stay, has been introduced by this firm—all their shilling boxes and upwards of cards are most delicately perfumed with Old English Lavender—than which there is no sweeter scent—and this absolutely free of all extra expense.

Novelty, beauty, and finish are exemplified in their latest specialties. But, perhaps, surpassing all are the beautiful "Platino Panels," which are worthy of careful preservation as permanent works of art.

The advance in the artistic taste of the public is strikingly shown in the collection of Calendars issued by Messrs. Raphael Tuck. Among these there are no less than one hundred and seventy entirely new designs, which for novelty, ingenuity, and artistic merit have never been equalled. Foremost among these must be mentioned the "Fair Heroines" Series. These are ideal portraits of some of the favourite heroines of Shakespeare and Goldsmith, most delicately reproduced in monochrome, upon large card panels, the whole being fastened with a silk ribbon for suspension. This calendar would be a charming addition to the most daintily-furnished apartment.

Nor have the little ones been forgotten. Father Tuck's Toy Books are now a household

word. The new collection comprises 130 new books, and Father Tuck's "Annual" makes



its first bow to an admiring Juvenile Public. The Illustrated G-f Books and Booklets, too,

are in bewildering variety and choice, and will be found even more tasteful than ever.

This must bring to a close our somewhat extended notice of this gigantic and wonderful collection, and all who have been fortunate enough to examine it, agree it is impossible to speak of it with any sense of justice without making free use of superlatives.

### KEARSLEY'S 100 YEARS' REPUTATION WIDOW WELCH'S FEMALE PILLS

Awarded Certificate of Merit for the cure of all obstinate irregularities, anæmia, and all female complaints. They contain no irritants, and have the approval of the Medical Profession. Beware of Imitations. The only genuine are in White Paper Packages, and have the name of "G. and G. Kearsley." Boxes in 1s., 1s. 10d., and 2s. 6d., of all chemists; sent privately on receipt of 14 or 24 stamps, by the makers, G. and G. KEARSLEY, 17, North Street, Westminster.

IF YOU ARE NOT USING

# CALVERT'S PURE CARBOLIC SOAPS

GIVE THEM A TRIAL AT ONCE.

## CALVERT'S CARBOLIC OINTMENT

IS UNEQUALLED AS A REMEDY FOR

Chafed Skin, Piles, Chapped Hands, Chilblains, Sore Eyes, Throat Colds, Earache, Neuralgic and Rheumatic Pains, Insect Bites, Scalds, Cuts, Ringworm, and Skin Ailments generally.

Large Pots, 1/4½ each, at Chemists, &c.; or Post Free for value.

Illustrated List of Calvert's Carbolic Preparations post free on application.

F. C. CALVERT & CO., P.O. BOX 512, MANCHESTER.

### 4/- SEWING MACHINE 4/-

Patented No. 42197.



"As supplied to Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Alexandra of Russia." THIS Machine does work which will bear comparison with that of other machines costing higher prices. Entirely made of metal, with steel and plated fittings. It works at great speed. It has no complicated levers or other machines, therefore does not require to be learnt. No winding of bobbins. No trouble. No teaching. No experience; and is everywhere superseding the old-fashioned troublesome machines. It works fine or coarse materials equally as well. Sent Carriage Paid for 4s. 6d.; two for 8s. 6d. Extra Needles, 6d. and 1s. per packet. Write for Press Opinions and Testimonials, or call and see the Machines at work. Address:

SEWING MACHINE CO.,

34 DEPT., 31, BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN, LONDON, E.C.

### PEARL COATED AND TASTELESS.

ARE THE BEST IN THE WORLD.

Composed of Steel, Pennyroyal, Bitter Apple, Aloes, Pilococcus and other Drugs known only to Dr. ALLEN.

Dr. ALLEN'S

**FAMOUS**  
145, STOCKWELL ROAD, LONDON, S.W.  
AVOID DISHONEST IMITATIONS.

**FEMALE PILLS**

1/11, 2/9 & 4/8.

SENT FREE FROM OBSERVATION.

Have no equal.

ADDRESS:

145, STOCKWELL ROAD, LONDON, S.W.

AVOID DISHONEST IMITATIONS.

## A Serial Story of Extraordinary Interest,

ENTITLED

## "WHAT LIES BEYOND?"

Commences Next Week.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

K. G.—Addresses are never given.  
 L. E.—It is purely a private matter.  
 A. R.—We cannot give the formula.  
 E. L.—Inquire of someone in the trade.  
 LEWIS.—Bats are not recoverable at law.  
 GERALD.—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.  
 CURIOSUS.—We could not afford the required space.  
 INQUIRE.—Sheffield was constituted a city in 1893.  
 R. L.—It is not the fact, but very much the reverse.  
 A. W.—Not unless they are in receipt of parish relief.  
 CYRIL.—The strongest fortress in the world is Gibraltar.  
 BOB.—English postage stamps are printed in this country.  
 BERNARD.—We do not give valuations; take it to a dealer.  
 PUZZLED.—"O. K." is a humorous abbreviation for "all correct."  
 LILLIAN.—We are not acquainted with the recitation you name.  
 CONSTANT READER.—There is no public institution which would take it.  
 A. F.—The indentures are binding on the master and apprentice alike.  
 IN TROUBLE.—We would recommend you to place all the evidence before a solicitor.  
 PAUL.—The largest trees are in Australia, some exceeding 400 feet in height.  
 REGULAR SUBSCRIBER.—He can be married in the name by which he has always been known.  
 VERA.—Only an expert can say. Take it to a first-class firm of musical instrument makers.  
 HENRY.—The greatest university is Oxford. It has twenty-one colleges and five halls.  
 DON.—There is no gold Canadian coin in existence, but the British sovereign is a legal tender.  
 L. G.—The husband should apply to the colonel for permission for her to live with him in barracks.  
 BETTY.—A few grains of salt sprinkled on coffee before adding the water brings out and improves the flavour.  
 F. M.—A person is not responsible for double contracted without his authority.  
 GLADYS.—You had better show it to a good dyer, who will say if he can bleach it out for you.  
 C. B.—There is no known cure except to keep the scalp in a healthy state.  
 ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—If there is no will the personal property must be divided equally among the next-of-kin.  
 NERVOUS.—Cod-liver oil can be easily taken in a little cold water, with a pinch of salt afterwards to remove the taste.  
 JIM.—The lodger is responsible for the rent of his rooms during absence on holiday, in the absence of any definite agreement.  
 INTERESTED.—An accused person in Scotland in whose case a verdict of "Not proven" is returned cannot be tried again on the same charge.  
 CLARE.—Yes; there is no reason why you should not wear yellow, if you have a certain amount of colour. If sallow, avoid it at all means.  
 V. E.—There are plenty of navvies and general labourers in all the colonies; any navy or labourer who emigrates must take his chance with local men.  
 DEBORAH.—The taste of fish may be removed from the blades of knives and tines of forks if a piece of lemon peel is rubbed across them.  
 DISTRESSED.—Unfortunately there is no cure for the scars left by smallpox, but they become fainter with age.  
 ANNETTE.—The damp of the new house may be the cause, but if properly done they ought to resist a good deal.  
 INDIGNANT.—A tradesman may refuse to sell an article from the window, just as he may refuse to sell any article in his shop if he so pleases.  
 MARY.—A teaspoonful of black pepper put into the water in which coloured stockings are washed will prevent them from fading.  
 D. C.—There are no examinations for the Civil Service Commission. The Commission itself examines by delegation.

BERNARD.—Apply to a reliable dealer. He will have a catalogue of all books published, and can get for you anything you want.

JENNY.—Finely powdered brick-dust and oil, or finely powdered emery and oil are better. Finish by polishing with erous and leather.

PHIL.—Consult a musical instrument maker and take the instrument to him that he may see it. Without inspection you cannot say what it needs.

QUEST.—We are not acquainted with any school of the sort, and even if we were, it would be against our rules to recommend it.

VERY ANXIOUS.—If you wish him to contribute towards its support, you must take out an affiliation summons within twelve months of the birth of the child.

GERALDINE.—Clean them with warm soapsuds and rinse with warm water and ammonia; then rub them over with whitening tied in a piece of muslin, and polish with a chamade skin.

HILDA.—Put a spoonful of jelly in a glass of water, dissolve it and add a very little sugar if desired. Jam and preserves strained and sweetened or made more acid with lemon juice are delicious.

## TEN YEARS AGO.

As ten long years ago he came,  
 So Cupid comes again to-night.  
 His face I know,  
 He's standing there,  
 Just by my chair,  
 As he stood ten years ago.

His arrow's sharp, his bows the same,  
 And he smiles as he did before.  
 Does he bring me woe?  
 Will his cruel dart  
 But crush my heart  
 As it did ten years ago?

"The soul is tried with sorrow," Cupid said,  
 "And grief makes men brave.  
 From disappointment virtues flow,  
 And only manhood wins that prize  
 Which youth doth struggle for and sacrifice,  
 As thou didst do ten years ago."

The bow is bent, the arrow's sped,  
 And the wound is made anew.  
 My soul's all aglow  
 And my heart is as light  
 As it was that night  
 When Cupid came ten years ago.

L. R.—A calendar month is, of course, a month by the calendar. From February 1st to March 1st is a calendar month, whatever the number of days in February.

AMELIA.—In ironing a shirt, first do the back, then the sleeves, the collar and bosom, and then the front. They should be ironed on the wrong side, when quite limp, with an iron not very hot. Always iron lace and embroidery on the wrong side.

R. H.—You do not say for what purpose you require it. For a rough and ready sort, ordinary black oil paint and a lump of yellow soap on which to occasionally rub the paint brush as you paint it over will do the work.

ETHEL.—Singing lessons always greatly improve the shape of the throat, and this has a great deal to do with breathing properly. Take a deep breath, and hold it as long as possible. Keep the neck always well and warmly covered.

BLANCHE.—Use a quart of milk; mix six spoonfuls of flour with a little of the milk first; add the rest by degrees with a teaspoonful of salt, two of beaten ginger, and two of tincture of saffron. Mix all together quite smoothly, and boil for an hour in a buttered basin.

DICKY.—All the flags for British ships of war, except the Royal standards, are made in the Government dockyards, and the enormous number required may be judged from the fact that in the colour lot at Chatham alone about 13,000 flags are made in a year.

A. K.—It is possible to go around the world and touch on British territory all the way—viz., from England to Halifax, across Canada to Vancouver, across the Pacific to Hong Kong, thence to Singapore, Penang, Mauritius, Cape Town, St. Helena, and England.

SOPHIA.—Do not commit such an act of madness as to make a secret marriage. Nothing but trial, trouble and sorrow comes from them. Exchange vows of fidelity if you will, but keep from anything in the way of concealment. If you must be married proclaim it to the world at once.

CURIOSUS.—The Royal Palace at Madrid is one of the most beautiful structures in the world, having been built by an Italian architect in the early part of the last century at a cost of about £1,000,000. The material is white marble. It is 470 feet each way, with a court 240 feet square, roofed with glass.

INQUIRER.—The tenor is the highest division of the male voice, and the term can never be correctly applied to a woman's voice. A soprano may sing the tenor part in a composition, but if she sings a solo it is a soprano solo. Songs are usually published in two keys—in a high one for soprano or tenor, and in a low one for the contralto or bass.

KEAN.—Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded at Fotheringhay Castle, in Northamptonshire, and buried in the cathedral at Peterborough. Her remains were afterwards removed to Westminster Abbey by her son James I., who had her monument placed beside her great rival Queen Elizabeth, at whose command this unfortunate princess was put to death.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—We are unable to advise you how or where you can obtain light employment to fill up a few hours of leisure time daily. We receive numerous applications of this kind. Many persons seem to think that there is a great deal to be done in copying manuscripts, but such work is not easy to get.

R. D.—The age to marry varies according to conditions. We do not think that a young man should marry before he is twenty-five, and he should not do so then unless he feels that he can support a wife in comfort. Before getting married a man should insure his life or make some provision by which his wife will not be left penniless should he die suddenly.

ARTHUR.—Pipe-clay is used for modelling and is prepared merely by wetting it as required. A lump of clay is placed in a vessel of water and allowed to remain three or four days. Then if it will not break down to the proper softness it is beaten with a wooden mallet. There are few more entertaining occupations than modelling. Simple subjects should be chosen at first and later more difficult ones may be attempted.

F. B.—In old times, when it was quite the fashion to bleed patients, the barber performed this operation in the absence of the physician. The pile represented the arm, the red colour the blood, and the white stripes the bandages. In view of the fact that bleeding is rarely resorted to nowadays, and that the barber would not be permitted to exercise a function that belongs strictly to the medical profession, it would seem wise to change the sign and adopt something that would be more to the purpose.

SUFFERER.—The following is guaranteed by a Russian physician to be an effective means of curing the worst cases of sea-sickness, and of avoiding it when the symptoms first make their appearance. It consists in taking long and deep inspirations. About twenty breaths should be taken every minute, and they should be as deep as possible. After thirty or forty inspirations have been taken, the symptoms will be found to abate, and in a few minutes they will disappear altogether. If the sickness reappears, the deep breathing should be at once resorted to.

A. R.—Many theories have been advanced as to the causes of the aurora, and scientists have been greatly at variance on this subject. One popular idea was that it was caused by the reflection of the sun upon icebergs. It now appears, from recent studies and comparisons, that the clouds and their positions have much to do with these phenomena. When the wind twists and whirls the clouds, the lines and bands of brightness seem to change and shift about. The sun spots are often the cause of the clouds, which in turn produce these wonderful and beautiful halos and stripes of brilliant colour with which we are familiar, and which have been admired by young and old probably since humanity became capable of admiration for the beautiful in nature.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free, Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Bookseller.

NOTICE.—The December and Christmas Double Part, 451 & 452, are now ready, price One Shilling; Post-free, One Shilling and Threepence. Also Vol. LXXI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXXI. is now ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS to be addressed to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 55, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

\*. We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.